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Organizing Nature as Business

Discursive Struggles, the Global Ecological Crisis, and a Social-Symbolic Deadlock

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DECLARATION

The candidate (George Ferns) confirms that:

a. the thesis has been composed by the candidate;
b. the work submitted is his/her own, except where work which has formed part of jointly-authored publications has been included. The contribution of the candidate and the other authors to this work has been explicitly indicated below;
c. the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification;
d. that appropriate credit has been given within the thesis where reference has been made to the work of others.

George Ferns, June 5, 2017

Article I (Struggles at the summits: Discourse coalitions, field boundaries, and the shifting role of business in sustainable development) was co-authored by the candidate and his supervisor, Professor Kenneth. The work directly attributable to Professor Amaeshi is primarily the content in the abstract and conclusion. The remainder of Article 1 is directly attributable to the candidate. Article I was published with Business & Society (forthcoming).

Kenneth Amaeshi June 5, 2017

Article II (Drilling their own graves: How the European oil and gas supermajors avoid sustainability tensions through mythmaking) was co-authored by the candidate and his supervisor, Professor Kenneth. The work directly attributable to Professor Amaeshi is primarily the content in the introduction. The remainder of Article II is directly attributable to the candidate.

Kenneth Amaeshi. June 5, 2017

Article IV (Stigma work in action: The case of the global fossil fuel divestment movement) was co-authored by the candidate and Maik Günther, a PhD student at Freie Universität

Berlin. The work directly attributable to Mr. Günther regards the content in the introduction; literature review; parts of the findings section; and parts of the discussion. The remainder of Article IV is directly attributable to the candidate.

Maik Günther, June 5, 2017

ABSTRACT

Despite looming ecological disaster, a persistent state of insufficient action seems commonplace amongst most organizations. This thesis critically explores how this impasse is constituted by discursive struggles surrounding the global ecological crisis. These struggles are situated within the context of global environmental governance – a power arena that has, over the past 25 years, become a defining battleground regarding environmental sustainability. Here, discourses of the ecological crisis are constituted by political contests amongst, most notably, multinational corporations, civil society organizations, and (trans)national policy actors.

This thesis draws mainly from post-structural discourse theory, coupled with critical perspectives on organizations and the natural environment, to explore both the discursive practices that fix meanings surrounding the global ecological crisis, and the power effects thereof. The primary source of data is text – this study is explicitly interested in how discourses of the global ecological crisis evolve as the natural environment is (mis)represented in organizational disclosures. Despite recognition by management and organization scholars that the natural environment is indeed constructed, a functional separation between business and nature persists, the relationship of which is mostly examined from a firm-centric perspective. However, sustainability issues such as climate change transcend the confines of firm activity and operate across spatial and temporal dimensions. Hence, there is an urgent need to reconsider the business-nature dualism. To do so, this study adopts a multi-level, multi-method approach that permits a necessary degree of analytical and theoretical flexibility.

The four individual articles that encompass this work, whilst drawing from different theoretical approaches, along with focusing on different levels of analysis, are underpinned by the contentious intersection between discourse, organizations and the natural environment. The first article concerns 'macro talk' and, operating on the field level, explores how a dominant understanding of business' role in sustainable development is constituted

during the UN Earth Summits in 1992, 2002, and 2012. The second article regards 'corporate talk' and, this time on an organizational level, examines how tensions between economic growth and environmental protection are avoided by the European oil and gas supermajors—BP, Shell and Total—through the practice of mythmaking. The third article takes a longitudinal approach and, also concerning 'corporate talk', examines how BP rearticulated a hegemonic discourse of fossil fuels, which, when enacted, reproduces corporate inaction on climate change. Finally, the fourth article emphasizes 'resistance talk', focusing on how climate activists, as part of the global fossil fuel divestment movement, engage in certain micro-level practices as they attempt to stigmatize the fossil fuel industry.

In all, the findings from these articles suggest that organizations both represent nature as something to be conquered, dominated, and valued economically and as a pristine wilderness to be preserved for the enjoyment of future generations. In pursuing these two extremes concurrently, organizations self-perpetuate a social-symbolic deadlock that hinders finding sustainable ways for human systems to coexist with natural systems. This thesis contributes mainly to literature on organizations and the natural environment by illustrating how certain practices, mechanisms, and processes continuously redefine the business-nature relationship by facilitating a discursive struggle across multiple spatial and temporal dimensions. In doing so, there are implications both for policy and business organizations, which are discussed in the concluding chapter of this work.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

[…] the grim reality is that our planet has reached a point of crisis and we have only seven years before we lose the levers of control. [Climate change] has the potential to take all the other critical issues we face as a global community and transform their severity into a cataclysm.
The Prince of Wales, Copenhagen Climate Change Summit (2009)

As the existence of environmental degradation is now commonly accepted, the conflict has become 'discursive': it is not about a predefined unequivocal problem with competing actors pro and con, but is rather a continuous struggle over the definition and meaning of the environmental problem itself.
Hajer (1997: 8)

[…] any simple assessment of the relationship between a single organisation and planetary sustainability is virtually impossible. The relationships and interrelationships are simply too complex. Furthermore, to assume that the notion of ''sustainability" has tangible meaning at the level of organisation is to ignore all we know about sustainability.
Gray (2010: 48)

Human progress[1] is currently at odds with natural systems. As indicated by Prince Charles (2009) in the quote above, the human-nature relationship has apparently resulted in a global crisis. I explore how this crisis is 'talked into being'. In line with Hajer's (1997) observation, I am specifically interested in the global ecological crisis as constituted by discourse. The human system under investigation here is organization. Whilst this thesis also concerns organizations, I do not necessarily examine 'the organization' as such. Instead, I consider organizations as part of a macro-level discursive struggle that occurs within the context of global environmental governance (Levy and Newell, 2005), whereby organizations vie to fix meanings surrounding the ecological crisis. In exploring this context, I step outside the narrowly defined confines of organizational life and, heeding Gray's (2010) observation, consider how discourses of the global ecological crisis are constituted as multi-level constructs. Thus, the overarching objective of this research is *to explore how the business-nature relationship is constituted by discursive struggles surrounding the global ecological crisis*

[1] Human progress is defined here as the continuous expansion of material wants through economic growth, technological advancement, and efficient markets (Jackson, 2009)

as they unfold across multiple spatial and temporal dimensions. This, is in turn, underpinned by two questions:

a. *What are the specific discursive practices that facilitate and/or hinder these struggles?*
b. *What are the power effects of enacting these practices?*

To address these questions, I adopt a multi-level, multi-method approach (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Phillips and Oswick, 2012; Starik and Rands, 1995) and present four articles. Both the overarching research objective and the supporting questions, to varying degrees, drive all four articles. By analyzing mostly publically available texts in the form of corporate reports and CEO speeches, policy documents, and civil society texts, coupled with news articles, each article considers a different 'voice' within the context of global environmental governance. The first article concerns '*macro talk*' and, operating on the field level (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012), explores how a dominant understanding of business' role in sustainable development is constituted over the three UN Earth Summits. The second article regards '*corporate talk*' and, this time on an organizational level, examines how tensions between economic growth and environmental protection are avoided by the three European supermajors—BP, Shell and Total—through corporate mythmaking (Boje et al., 1982; Filby and Willmott, 1988). The third article, also concerning '*corporate talk*', examines the discursive practices through which BP rebuilt a collapsed hegemonic structure (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). The fourth article includes micro-level dynamics and emphasizes '*resistance talk*'; focusing on how climate activists, as part of the global fossil fuel divestment movement, engaged in the stigmatization of the fossil fuel industry (Devers, Dewett, Mishina, and Belsito, 2009; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Drawing from both critical and poststructural interpretations of discourse (Alvesson and Deetz, 2006), the articles presented in this thesis are woven together by three strands – (1) unmasking any sort of 'natural' relationship between organizations and the natural environment; (2) detailing the discursive practices that construct this "naturalness"; and (3) exposing how certain organizational

representations of the natural environment are privileged, at the expense of other emancipatory discourses that threaten the status quo (Mumby, 2011).

This thesis is situated within the literature on organizations and the natural environment (Hahn et al., 2015; Hoffman and Bansal, 2012; Nyberg and Wright, 2015). I problematize these conversations by asking questions such as: what does the term "management" imply with respect to nature? Is there in fact a nature to be managed? If so, is nature willingly being managed, or it is being coerced to do so? Who precisely benefits from managing the environment, nature or humans, and at what expense? Posing these sorts of questions suggests that, in general, literature on organizations and the natural environment furthers a dichotomization of organizations and nature (Gladwin, 2012; Shrivastava, 1994). Thereby, much of this literature—and by implication our understanding of corporate responses to environmental issues such as climate change—reproduces a one-dimensional ontology of nature (Banerjee, 2012b). This is not only theoretically limiting, but also dangerous for the future well-being of the Earth system as our understanding of business-nature relations may be 'trapped' in an firm-centric myopia (Marcus et al., 2010; Whiteman et al., 2013). Indeed, as I suggest, this does not only implicate mainstream organization and management research regarding natural environment; critical scholars too have largely failed to produce substantive alternatives to a business-as-usual approach (with few exceptions, e.g., Böhm, 2006; Gray, 2010; Tregidga, Milne, and Kearins, 2015). This thesis seeks to address this shortcoming by expanding the 'field of discursivity' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001) beyond the confines of the firm to emphasize the politicized construction of the organization-nature relationship.

The proceeding chapters are structured as follows. First, in Chapter 2, I discuss the background of this study, addressing the ecological crisis from the perspectives of natural science, culture and finally personal reflection. Next, I present the thesis' conceptual framework in Chapter 3, addressing nature, organization, and discourse. I discuss each concept, its philosophical underpinnings, and how it relates to the studies. Afterwards, in

Chapter 4, I situate the conceptual framework within a context, presenting a brief history of corporate environmentalism, and then discussing the role of business within global environmental governance. Next, in Chapter 5, I situate the thesis within the literature on organizations and the natural environment by problematizing three main conversations: business-as-forever-usual; business-as-little-less-than-usual; and business-as-critically-explored. This chapter also highlights the main 'gap' in the literature that this thesis aims to address. I suggest that there is a need to step outside the organization – so to speak – and explore how the organization-nature relationship is constituted by discursive struggles that operate across multiple spatial and temporal dimensions. This leads to Chapter 6, which presents the methodological approach of this thesis and discusses the data analysis strategy. Here, I address three points: how I approach discourse analysis including the types of text analyzed; my role as a discourse analyst; and why I have 'chosen' discourse analysis as a suitable form of analysis for this study. In Chapter 7 I briefly summarize each of the articles and provide a chronicled narrative that illustrates their interconnectedness. Thereafter, I present each of the four articles in Sections 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4. Finally, in Chapter 8, I discuss this thesis' main contributions, implications, and limitations.

CHAPTER 2 – BACKGROUND

In this chapter I illustrate the motivations that led to the manifestation of my thesis. As common with social science research, providing a definitive answer as to why anything happens is tricky. Instead, I reflect on some of the concerns, experiences, and curiosities that form part of my identity as researcher, and by implication the topic of this thesis. I was inspired to situate my PhD study in the natural scientific observation that the Earth system is under tremendous strain at the expense of human development and economic growth, which I initially discuss. I then highlight the socio-cultural complexity of the ecological crisis—from individual, corporate and political economy perspectives—to explain some of the drivers of human inaction regarding environmental issues. Lastly, I reflect on own experiences with respect to the ecological crisis, which underpin my motivation for writing this thesis.

2.1. The ecological crisis

The critical state of the Earth system is well evidenced (IPCC, 2014)[2]. Several planetary boundaries—the limits within which humans can safely operate—have already been breached (Steffen et al., 2015; Whiteman et al., 2013). Biodiversity loss for instance occurs so rapidly that more than half of the planet's ecosystems cannot self-regenerate (Newbold et al., 2016). Land-systems changes, especially related to deforestation, are also facing profound consequences with some predictions estimating that more than half of the Amazon's tree species are at high risk of extinction (Steege et al., 2015). Ocean life is also seriously affected. Currently, an area covering approximately 7000 square miles in the Gulf of Mexico—referred to as the 'dead zone'—contains no marine life due to extremely low oxygen in the water (Diaz and Rosenberg, 2008). This is one of many effects caused by a tenfold increase of nitrogen over the past 150 years, largely attributed to the use of fertilizers for agricultural activity (Oita

[2] Reference to the Earth system is a commonly used by natural sciences – in particular with respect to literature on the Anthropocene concept – to capture the total functioning of all planetary elements, as Langmuir and Broecker (2012: 20, 22) describe: "The various parts of the Earth system – rock, water, atmosphere – are all involved in interrelated cycles where matter is continually in motion and is used and reused in the various planetary processes. Without interlocked cycles and recycling, Earth could not function as a system."

et al., 2016). Other planetary boundaries close to reaching tipping points include: ozone depletion, freshwater system disruption, and other forms of chemical pollution (Rockström et al., 2009). The consequences are already strikingly visible as the iconic before-and-after comparisons of glaciers, landscapes, and lakes clearly show (NASA, 2017). Before the middle of the 21st century, Arctic inhabitants will likely experience their first ever "ice-free" summer (Wang and Overland, 2012).

On March 14, 2016, concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO_2) in the atmosphere reached a global average of 400 parts per million (ppm) – for the first time maintaining this figure for over a month (NOAA, 2016). According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2014)—the international authority on climate change science—climate change becomes dangerous when global CO_2 concentrations surpass 350 ppm. The seriousness of exceeding 400 ppm cannot stressed enough, as a Guardian headline for instance reads: "Carbon dioxide's 400 ppm milestone shows humans are rewriting the planet's history" (Readfearn, 2016). When breached, the dangerous effects of climate change become an inevitability – the only option left to avoid ecological catastrophe is to reduce emissions to zero (Hansen et al., 2008). However, irrespective of this claim, even the most conservative trends show no signs of any substantial emissions reductions globally; instead, emissions are estimated to continue to rise. Thus, it might come as no surprise that already in 1990, as indicated in the IPCC's First Assessment Report (1990: v), scientists warned of climate change being "potentially the greatest global environmental challenge facing mankind [sic]."

These developments are so pronounced that we have apparently entered a new geological epoch – the Anthropocene – as initially proposed by Nobel prize-winning scientist Paul Crutzen (Steffen et al., 2007, 2015). Characterized by the impressive influence that humans now exert over the Earth system, in the Anthropocene, natural phenomena are defined through humanity's large-scale *geological* as opposed to immediate biological impacts (Morton, 2007). Contrasting the previous Holocene period, which we now leave behind, by entering the Anthropocene natural order becomes unnaturally disordered, and any

equilibrium becomes a human induced dis-equilibrium. By accepting this idea, ecological catastrophe is not something we await, but something that is already happening (Hamilton and Grinevald, 2015).

So, if we 'know' what is causing this ecological crisis, why have no large-scale meaningful solutions been implemented? Although I discuss this question at greater length in Section 3.1, the short answer is culture and politics – i.e., human interaction with nature. As Mike Hulme (2009) in the preface of his seminal book, *Why We Disagree about Climate Change* states:

> *Far from simply being a change in physical climates – a change in the sequences of weather experienced in given places – climate change has become an idea that now travels well beyond its origins in the natural sciences. And as this idea meets new cultures on its travels and encounters the worlds of politics, economics, popular culture, commerce, international diplomacy and religion – often through the interposing role of the media – climate change takes on new meanings and serves new purposes.*

I wish to extend Hulme's (2009) diagnosis, that environmental issues do not merely travel beyond the origins of the natural sciences, but traverse local, regional, national, and supranational boarders. Indeed, when recognized on the international political stage as problem requiring immediate action, environmental issues quickly become part of a global ecological crisis. With respect to climate change, this occurred during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s; exemplified for instance by former prime minister Margaret Thatcher's (1989) address to the UN general assembly:

> *What we are now doing to the world, by degrading the land surfaces, by polluting the waters and by adding greenhouse gases to the air at an unprecedented rate—all this is new in the experience of the earth. It is mankind and his activities [sic] which are changing the environment of our planet in damaging and dangerous ways. […] The environmental challenge that confronts the whole world demands an equivalent response from the whole world.*

Adding a social, and thereby political, dimension to environmental issues complicates matters further as culturally sensitive matters must be considered. Indeed, as Desmond Tutu argues, the negative impact of human activity on the Earth system is both "the human rights challenge of our time [and] a deep injustice" (2014a). Take for instance that those affected most severely by the negative impacts of environmental issues have done the least to deserve it (Costello et al., 2009; OECD, 2003). The most obvious "losers" in this respect are future generations, likely to be born into an atmosphere already overburdened by pollutants. The world's poor will also suffer disproportionately. The World Bank estimates that climate change will place an additional 100 million people into extreme poverty by 2030, the vast majority living in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Hallegatte et al., 2017). The United Nations concurs, signaling that climate change will result in reduced crop yields, more waterborne deceases, higher food prices, and greater civil unrest and conflict (FAO, 2016). Furthermore, it is widely recognized that women, given their lower social status especially in developing countries, will be significantly more disadvantaged from the effects of changes to the natural environment compared to their male counterparts (McCright, 2010; WHO, 2014). How does one begin to incorporate such cultural complexities into the process of environmental policy making? Even if successful, to what extent should such considerations be sidelined in cases where they obstruct economic growth?

These types of questions shed light on what sometimes seems a near-impossible task of addressing the global ecological crisis. After all, it is bizarre that despite the scientific evidence presented above, coupled with realizing that a large-scale ecological catastrophe looms, humans persistently engage in the destruction of their own habitat. Psychoanalysts have termed this "ecocide" and, drawing from Freud's notion of the death-drive, propose that it is a form of madness (Bradshaw and Zwick, 2016; Samuels, 2015; Taylor, 2014). Unsurprisingly, committing ecocide on a mass scale is a criminal office; chargeable by the International Criminal Court in The Hague alongside genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes (Higgins, 2016). Such self-destructive effects for society as a whole were

famously documented by ecologist Garrett Hardin (1986: ii) in his paper on the *Tragedy of the Commons*, in which Hardin reflected on "the damage that innocent actions by individuals can inflict on the environment." A striking example here pertains to how the Easter Islander civilization completely wiped itself out as each islander, acting out of self-interest, cut down trees for their own consumption, neglecting that at some point their island will be resource-barren. In this vein, Diamond (2005: 114) poses a chilling question: "what did the Easter Islander who cut down the last palm tree say while he was doing it?"

It is of course not only individuals and societies that are implicated in ecocidal behavior: companies too are increasingly foregrounded both as key contributors, as well as probable solutions of the ecological crisis (Kock et al., 2012; Levy, 2005). This mostly notably pertains to large, publically-visible firms that provide energy-related products and services. But not all companies are perceived equally. On the one hand, some businesses are typified as examples of how capitalism can be harnessed to solve ecological issues; here, Elon Musk's green-tech ventures, which include electric supercars, long-lasting home batteries, and solar roof tiles, are a case in point (Sofge, 2014). On the other hand, some businesses are vilified for their role in furthering the ecological crisis (Goldenberg, 2015; Lovell, 2010), which notoriously regards companies that profit from selling fossil fuel based products (the stigmatization of these companies is addressed in Article IV). Fossil fuel companies' core product – oil, natural gas, and coal – when burnt, releases greenhouse gasses and contributes to dangerous climate change (IEA, 2014; Johnson et al., 2006). Celebrity environmentalist, Bill McKibben (2012), is outspoken regarding fossil fuel companies:

> *[…] clear is that the planet does indeed have an enemy – one far more committed to action than governments or individuals. [We] need to view the fossil fuel industry in a new light. It has become a rogue industry, reckless like no other force on Earth. It is Public Enemy Number One to the survival of our planetary civilisation.*

Yet, whilst many fossil fuel companies in some form or another publically recognize climate change and its anthropogenic causes, 'turning off the taps' seems unlikely as this might upset

shareholders, amongst others (Stevens, 2016). Likewise, 'keeping the taps turned on' may lead to ecological catastrophe; if the current reserves the top 200 publicly-traded fossil fuel companies were burnt, 745Gt of CO_2 emissions would be released into the Earth's atmosphere, which surpasses the 565Gt carbon budget that may not be breached to avoid dangerous climate change (IPCC, 2014). Considering that these 200 companies only represent about 5% of total global fossil fuel reserves underscores the seriousness of the situation – not only for the future of the planet, but fossil fuel companies themselves (Carbon Tracker Initiative, 2012). In this vein, if governments impose restrictions on the amount of carbon that may be omitted, fossil fuel companies' current reserves may have to remain in the ground; effectively rendering these assets as "stranded," or worthless (Paun et al., 2015).

But are individual companies to be blamed for the ecological crisis? After all, firms are embedded within much larger social and economic systems (Levy and Lichtenstein, 2011). Herein, the role of firms and policy actors becomes contradictory. Take for instance how responses to the ecological crisis by most firms and governments are constituted by ecological modernization discourse, which is predicated on the notion that "the only way out of the ecological crisis is by going further into the process of modernization" (Mol in York and Rosa, 2003: 272). Economic systems too are defined by paradox. As Marx indicated with his notion of metabolic rift, and as many of his contemporaries have suggested (Schnaiberg and Gould, 2000), capitalism itself flourishes on the "enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces" (Marx and Engels, 1998: 42). In this respect, for capitalism to survive, it must continuously expand itself, which, in turn, relies on environmental degradation (Böhm et al., 2012; Foster et al., 2010). Wright and Nyberg (2015b: 29) frame this tension between economy and ecology as "absurd" based on the notion that: "[businesses] have argued that the cure for the environmental ills within corporate capitalism is more corporate capitalism and that the problem, as if by magic, is therefore actually the solution."

Overall, the global ecological crisis poses a threat to humanity in unprecedented ways, and solutions are not easily identifiable because of the complexity that arises when considering

individual, firm, and political economy perspectives. Whilst this study does not aim to provide such an alternative paradigm *per se*, I do explore how the relationship between humans and nature has become so destructive. However, I am neither a natural scientist nor an environmental economist: I am not necessarily interested nor qualified to find answers, correct inefficiencies, or 'fix' problems with respect the natural environment. Rather, I am interested in how the ecological crisis has become a crisis in a cultural sense, as informed by discourse. Indeed, as Prasad and Elmes note: "how we 'talk' about and represent the natural environment has serious ramifications for how we will conceptualize and enact our future relationships with it" (2005: 853). Given that my work is concerned with discourse, and given its interpretative nature, this study is as personal (not to mention political), as it is empirical. It is therefore important to reflect upon how this study's overarching objective emerged from my personal experiences. The importance of doing so is further apparent in the concluding chapter, which takes a more normative approach.

2.2. Personal motivation

This study's focus on the natural environment has largely been motivated by my evolving, and sometimes difficult relationship with society and nature. In the ensuing section I briefly describe how this relationship has unfolded, including the influence of this personal journey for my work.

For me, experiencing nature means going on a coastal walk or hopping in the car to visit a national park for the weekend. Here I can 'get out', take a moment to breath fresh air, listen to the birds sing, stare into the starry night and, in some rare instances, find meaning to my existence if only for a split second. Strangely though, to do so, I have always needed to go find nature, check local weather predictions, ensure my phone is fully charged, and so on. Finally, upon arriving in nature, and after pausing and reflecting or a moment or two, I somehow experience it. Only then does nature present itself in all its beauty. Why does nature never come to me, I wonder? It only seems to do so when in its destructive form, like the sly fox scavenging through my rubbish bin in the dark of night, or the wind that once raged so

ferociously it split my neighbor's tree in half. Indeed, we sometimes force nature to come to us, but, for me, it loses its romanticism—the manicured trees outside my office window or cute otters during their feeding time at the zoo—this is not real nature, I tell myself. There are other options, such as being glued to an episode of BBC's Planet Earth in awe of the Arctic's celebrity-status inhabitant, the polar bear, dragging her enormous paws lazily across the white snowy tundra. I suppose this must be where the 'real' nature is located; a dangerous, raw, and uncontrolled wilderness that seems detached from our daily existence.

On a few occasions, I have sought to transcend this impasse. I suppose my motivation, and many others', resonates with that of Chris McCandlessin, the protagonist in Jon Krakauer's (1996) non-fiction book *Into the Wild*, who decides one day to leave behind all his material possessions and head into the Alaskan wilderness, dying at the end of the book after eating a poisonous shrub. McCandlessin's story is extreme, yet captures the near-impossible desire of returning to nature. I too have experienced this impossibility, travelling to all over the world, finding nature, yet failing to establish a lasting connection. For instance, once I trekked through Uganda's Bwindi Forest to find endangered mountain gorillas. This was a thrilling experience, not only because of seeing gorillas in the wild, but because of the extended time I spent in a tropical rain forest. The exhausting trek lasted for about eight hours and upon stumbling upon a group of about 25 gorillas somewhat serendipitously, I felt a sudden rush of adrenalin, confronted with a wild beast. But did I really? Were these animals in fact wild, and if so, why did it not kill me and eat me? Were the gorillas habituated perhaps, worse even, maybe they were tagged with location devices so not to disappoint eager tourists such as myself? Most importantly though, why after having spent time with the gorillas did I feel even further detached from nature? Is it because I experienced them through my camera's viewfinder, instead of just observing them? Maybe it is that my entire experience involved a mass tourist organizational exercise – the park permits, camping site, insurance, vaccinations, trekking gear, visas, and of course the 'I survived the gorillas' t-shirt, were all so *un*-natural. After all, I was there as a tourist, paying a lot of money, just like the other

members of our expedition, all of whom, funnily enough, looked exactly like me. We had the same color skin, the same hiking boots, the same rain jacket, the same type of digital camera, the same headlamp. We were also engaged in the same activity of spotting the gorillas, and hence, ended up with the same set of pictures.

So, what does the above reflection mean for this study? These experiences are important because they shape my work conceptually. More specifically, underpinning the above reflections are two key concepts that, considered together, guide this study: culture and nature. On the one hand, culture regards human activity – involving societies and individuals pondering about their own existence, and their complex relationship to one another, and how to 'get ahead', move forward, and progress. On the other hand, nature regards ecological phenomena and objects that are not created by humans, that have properties essential only to nature itself – rocks, wild animals, and forests are (technically) not culturally determined. It is this schism that has been at the epicenter of my frustration, and thus motivation for this study. Gladwin et al (1995: 854) consider this impasse theoretically important too, for instance referring to it as a: "profound epistemological crisis: the conceptual division and resultant disassociation between humankind (and its organizations) and the remainder of the natural world." However, this strict division is radically changing as the advent of the Anthropocene suggest, by organizing nature so that it furthers human progress, nature has become more human than nature (Latour, 2013).

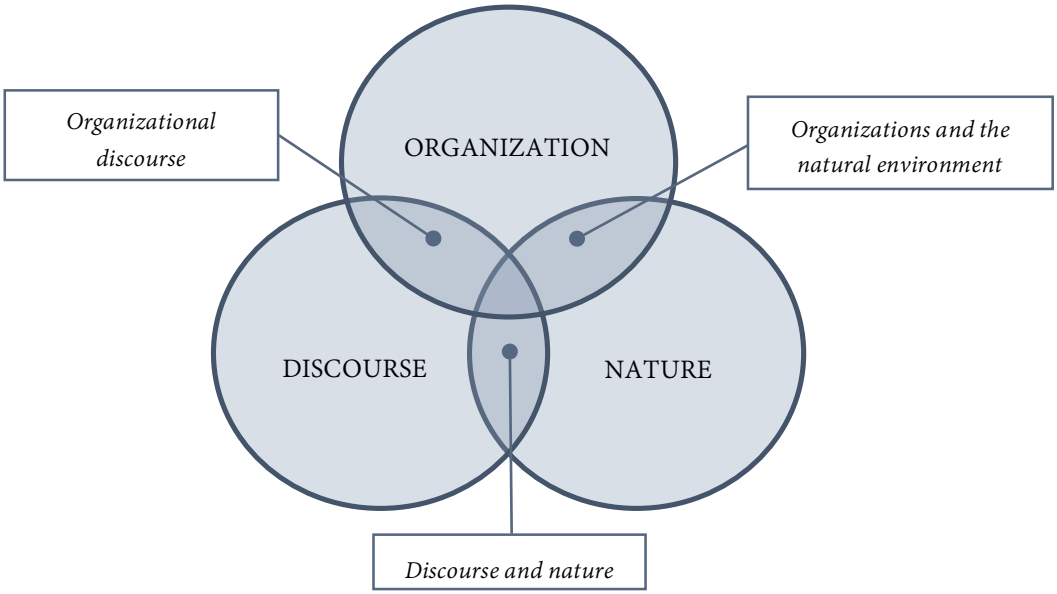
Additionally, it highlights my personal motivation for exploring the natural environment, as opposed to social phenomena. Admittedly, my PhD journey started off with a topic that was somewhat different to the one I am writing about now. My research proposal focused on sustainable development, but from the perspective of human development. I was specifically interested the role of business with respect to poverty alleviation in developing country contexts. Yet, as the work progressed, I found myself increasingly intrigued by the study of natural environment. In part, I was influenced by the increasingly alarming tone of climate change discourses, coupled with a growing interest within the academic community to

explore the natural environment as a 'grand challenge' (George et al., 2016). Nevertheless, especially now during the latter phases of the dissertation, experiences such those described above have resurfaced as particularly formative. Tensions between being a human – existential questions and all – and desiring to 'experience' nature but feeling somehow eternally separated, are deeply perplexing. The lack of answers in the literature is worrying because the relationship between humans and nature is toxic, and by most accounts, dangerous. Therefore, engaging with nature through research enquiry takes on a particular responsibility. Again, this has developed a drive to better understand how and why societies experience nature in the way they do.

CHAPTER 3 – CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As depicted in Figure 1., this study's overarching conceptual framework is composed of three interrelated elements – nature; discourse; and organization. In the ensuing sections, I discuss each of these concepts, both theoretically and in terms of philosophical assumptions. Where appropriate, I also address conceptual overlaps – i.e., the shaded areas in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Illustration of conceptual framework



3.1. Nature - philosophical perspectives

Nature is diverse; discursively speaking, there are many "natures" (Castree, 2015; Macnaghten and Urry, 1998b; Wallace et al., 2011). For this study, it is important to distinguish two dominant discourses: 'nature as real' and 'nature as constructed'[3]. Whereas realist accounts consider nature as existing independently from social practices, constructivist accounts are anti-essentialist and consider nature as experienced subjectively. Although this thesis is grounded in a constructivist perspective, at certain points I do refer to

[3] I recognize here that the discussion regarding nature's philosophical underpinnings is much richer in comparison to what I have presented. However, given that my thesis is not focused necessarily on reconceptualizing nature ontologically, or otherwise, the distinction between 'nature as constructed' and 'nature as real' should suffice. Nevertheless, the next section (3.1), I delve deeper into 'nature as constructed' by situating 'constructed' with a discourse tradition.

a 'real' nature—here I use terms such as "nature," "natural system," "Earth system" or "natural phenomenon"—as demonstrated, for instance, in the beginning of this thesis in the discussion of Earth system's declining ecological well-being. I do so for purely practical reasons, not because I ascribe to a realist ontology of nature *per se*. Rather, this thesis is concerned with nature's deterioration as stemming from a culturally (ill)determined understanding of nature that prioritizes human wants over natural systems. As such, it is important to be clear about the distinction between these two nature regimes (Escobar et al., 1999).

The 'nature as real' perspective considers natural phenomena as having inherent properties governed by an organic biophysicality independent from socio-cultural influence; nature is thus "an independent domain of intrinsic value, truth, or authenticity" (Soper, 1996: 32). Here, essential properties are considered 'natural laws' that are *the* inherent force ordering both human and non-human life. Whilst humans are certainly part of nature, from a realist position, their impacts are only meaningful to the extent that they materially influence natural systems. This is based on the logic that "although the biophysical can exist without the social, the converse is categorically impossible" (Carolan, 2005: 394). Here, nature is grounded in an objectivist epistemology: there is a clear delineation between the investigator and the investigated – i.e., nature as 'object' to be measured, evaluated, and counted. As such, it is often closely associated with modern scientific approaches to solving environmental issues. As Macnaghten and Urry (1998a: 1) argue: "social practices play a minor role in any such analysis since the realities which derive from scientific inquiry are held to transcend the more superficial and transitory patterns of everyday life." Nonetheless, it is not natural scientists alone that ascribe to this paradigm. Critical realists, for instance, insist on the distinction between the material aspects of nature, and what is constructed, or "the acts of construing, interpreting, categorizing or naming" (Sayer, 1997: 468). I follow up on this debate later in Section 3.2, it terms of how discourse theory bridges the material and the discursive.

A constructionist view of nature moves beyond nature as materially bound, instead foregrounding nature as constructed through socio-symbolic processes. Natural and social systems are considered intertwined – as Irwin (2001: 24) suggests: "We do not simply observe raw nature in a cultural vacuum." Nature stops functioning only in and of its own material essences and instead becomes represented, mediated and performed by cultural scripts (Szerszynski et al., 2004). As such, the global ecological crisis is in and of itself a product of the construction of meanings around 'crisis'. Nature cannot give itself this identity of being 'in crisis', as Escobar et al (1999: 15) note: "crisis of nature is a crisis of nature's identity."

Thus, the way social relations affect nature, determine nature's meaning. Separating these from one another—i.e., considering nature and culture as independent—is problematic theoretically because it neglects the interconnectedness between human and nature, and reproduces an oversimplified dualism (Latour, 2013). Nature as constructed problematizes this objectivist approach to understanding natural phenomena. With respect to environmental issues, Hajer and Versteeg (2005: 176) draw from Beck (1995), insisting that:

> *[…] it is not an environmental phenomenon in itself that is important, but the way in which society makes sense of this phenomenon. Dying forests do not contain in themselves the reason for the public attention and concern they receive. The fact that they do receive this attention at a specific place and time cannot be deduced from a natural-scientific analysis of its urgency, but from the symbols and experiences that govern the way people think and act.*

A constructivist understanding of nature as applied in this thesis is therefore anti-essentialist, anti-objectivist, and certainly anti-positivist. Through the emergence of a cultural dimension, nature is no longer an entity in and of itself, separate from human influence. As McKibben (1989: 104) proposes: "We have killed off nature - that world entirely independent of us which was here before we arrived and which encircled and supported our human society." Rocks, oceans, and forests – generally considered non-human and therefore concerning natural systems – become culturally determined objects, stamped with the cultural footprint of modern civilization (Morton, 2007). Nature of course does not vanish as such, it merely

stops being defined by its own set of rules; it stops being pure and rather is experienced depending on the socio-symbolic context within which it is constituted. Indeed, nature becomes subject to cultural definitions, as Castree (2005: 35) highlights: "[...] the things we call nature undoubtedly exist. But it is entirely a matter of convention that we group them together under the one term. Even if the term isn't explicitly invoked to describe them, it is clear that it's nonetheless there in the background."

That nature is culturally constituted is exemplified by dominant understanding of nature as something to manage, control and dominate (Macnaghten and Urry, 1998b; Urry, 2011). These ideas are grounded in Western thought, which emphasizes that there exists a separation between culture and nature, between human and beast (Escobar, 1996). Indeed, as Banerjee (2003: 152) contends, the translation of nature from a hostile wilderness to a nature that is can be managed through proper control mechanisms—i.e., the natural environment[4]—is a hallmark of modernity:

> *One consequence of conceptualizing nature as environment is the abstraction of singularity from the multiple meanings of nature, ranging from the essence or character of an object; the physical world around us; living and nonliving things; the specific ecology of places; notions of wilderness and ruralness; and the aesthetic or spiritual values assigned to nature.*

The origins of "nature as dominated" by humans can be traced to the Judeo-Christian ethic that God gave the material world to humans as a gift to better themselves (Hoffman and Sandelands, 2005; White, 1967). As a much-quoted passage from the Book of Genesis reads: "Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Gen 1:26-28 in Kohlenberger, 2004). We are therefore encouraged to be nature's master; a notion that was similarly furthered during the Enlightenment period when instruments,

[4] I do not use the term "natural environment" and "nature" interchangeably. I consider "natural environment" as a totalized meaning system that includes within it all definitions of nature, yet besides "nature" itself. When I use the term "nature" I refer to the realist sort of nature as discussed above, which, at least philosophically, contains nothing but nature by itself.

coupled with reason, quickly began to triumph over a chaotic and "wild" nature. Interesting, this is evidence of an early discursive struggle regarding the meaning of nature. The Romantic movement that started in Europe toward the end of the 18th century constructed a counter discourse aimed at resisting modernist casting of nature (Hess, 2012). This sentiment is captured by William Wordsworth, the poet and romantic par excellence, who famously wrote about the Lake District: "it is a sort of national property in which every man [sic] has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy" (Wordsworth in Barker and Stockdale, 2008: 185). These two clashing constructions of nature exemplifies how different meanings of nature are constructed over time, a process that is culturally informed. This is important for this study given that issues pertaining to nature, including the global ecological crisis, are conceptualized as socially constructed, as part of our subjective experience. This helps explain why – despite being relatively assured about certain functions of eco-systems in crisis, for example as natural scientists declare a consensus on climate change – there remains a schism between those who "believe" in climate change and those who do not (Hoffman, 2015).

The idea of a constructed nature has certainly not evaded critique (Carolan, 2005; Demeritt, 2002). Concern is often raised about the 'strength' of constructivism, and the apparent neglect of the material (Newton, 2005). I too sometimes struggle with accounts of nature that seem over-socialized. Surely there is a nature which cannot be represented; a material space where nature happens irrespective of human experience, or perhaps extra-symbolic realm that evades all attempts at representation. After all, how can one account for Soper's claim that "[…] it is not language that has put a hole in its ozone layer" (1996: 136). To address such concerns, and thereby hopefully avoid philosophical determinism, there are certain sensitivities that require reflection. In the next section I engage with these sensitivities; illustrating how a constructed nature is the product of *discourse* (Escobar et al., 1999; Hajer and Fischer, 1999). In doing so, the ecological crisis becomes determined by language, or

more specifically, language use within a system of power relations (Livesey, 2002a; Okereke et al., 2009; Springett, 2003).

3.2. Discourse, the discursive, and discursive effects

I draw from a poststructuralist understanding of discourse (hereafter discourse theory) inspired mostly by the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1991) and Foucault (Foucault, 1972, 1989), which I situate within the critical organizational discourse studies tradition (Alvesson and Deetz, 2006; Hardy and Phillips, 1999). In doing so, I carefully straddle "the critical edge of postmodernism," situating my use of discourse within "a broader critical tradition which challenges the status quo and supports silenced or marginalized voices" (Alvesson and Deetz, 2006: 356). Discourse in this thesis refers to a relatively stable collection of articulated statements that constitute both objects and subjects. This stabilization of meaning is, as proposed by Calás and Smircich (1999: 654), "constituted within a system of power relations—a system of inclusion and exclusion—which defines as acceptable or not the marks that will appear on the page as knowledge." In this thesis, I explore how the stabilization of meaning regrading global ecological crisis is constituted by a struggle amongst organizations operating within the context of global environmental governance. Relatedly, I examine how representations of the ecological crisis include certain versions of the 'truth', at the expense of other 'non-truths' (Mumby, 2005). There are four major themes that underpin my use of discourse theory in this thesis: first, discourse as productive in constituting social reality; second, discourse as determining the conditions of possibility; third, discourse as embedded in a cultural context; and fourth, discourse as having ideological effects. I next address several key components of discourse, namely: articulation, object, subject, field of discursivity, extra-discursive, and the Real.

3.2.1. Discourse as productive

First, I refer to discourse as *productive* in the sense that it does not reflect a pre-existing social reality, but actively constitutes it (Cooper and Burrell, 1988a; Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

The role of discourse analysis is thus to understand how objects and subjects come to be, and further, how concepts become "known" as truth. From a discourse theory perspective, "truth" is ephemeral in this sense that its stability is bound by its own innate instability. Discourse analysis is therefore especially useful in order to, as argued by Chia (2000: 518): "understand how societies construct their social worlds, how the flux and flow of the world is arrested and regularized and then translated into pragmatic use, how societal/global trends shift and so on."

Following from the previous section, nature as constituted by discourse is often rejected for neglecting material realities, and even that it is counterproductive in addressing sustainably issues; realists in particular have long declared an unease with respect to nature as culturally determined. Their concern is often attributed to the way discourse studies somehow 'denaturalizes' natural crises (O'Keefe et al., 1976). Relatedly, a discursive approach apparently infers a sense of "intellectual and social relativism, [which] can be just as destructive to nature as bulldozers and chain saws" (Soulé and Lease, 1995: xv). If indeed this was the case, a discursive understanding of issues surrounding the natural environment would neglect there are clearly power interests at play, including serious material consequences depending on the outcome of environmental crises (Dunlap and Catton, 1994). Thus, realists insist that nature cannot be reduced to language alone – after all, as Soper (1996: 137) argues:

> *[…] it is no more appropriate to think of bodies and sexualities as the 'construct' of cultural practice and discourse than it is to think of the landscape as 'constructed' out of agricultural practices or as the discursively constituted effect of Romantic poetry.*

Few discourse theorists would necessarily reject Soper's claim that nature consists of material elements that may have an existence outside the human experience. However, the approach Soper and so many others take equates discourse theory with textual idealism whereby nothing exists outside discourse (e.g., Benton, 1993; Dickens, 1996). Whilst this might be the case with a 'strong' constructivist ontology, for example in the Derridarian deconstructionist

sense, the approach taken in my work rejects the non-existence of a material reality. For the purpose of this thesis, what is important are the meanings that are constructed about nature, and the implications therein. Here, Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 108) provide some reflection regarding this debate:

> *An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or 'expressions of the wrath of God', depends upon the structuring of a discursive field.*

Framed differently, although a material world evidently exists, accessing this space, and by implication our ability to identify with material objects is dependent on their cultural mediation. This way, Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 108) through their discourse theory "affirm the material character of every discursive structure." Objects that have not yet been articulated are contained within, as I discuss below in 2.2.2.3, an extra-discursive space (Willmott, 2005). For instance, throughout the 1970s the widening hole in the ozone layer was "unknown" until being "discovered" in the early 1980s and named 'the hole in the ozone layer'. That does not mean that the "hole" was not widening before it was named and brought to the attention of the international political and scientific community (Hajer, 1997). Rather, material phenomena such as the hole in the ozone layer, remains unintelligible and cannot constitute a reality that we experience knowingly, or as Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 108), suggest: "What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence." Attempting to represent such an extra-discursive space in its totality is thus futile; "nature" when constructed, relies on a body of preconceived knowledges that are themselves discursively bound (Butler, 1993).

3.2.2. Discourse as determining the conditions of possibility

The second important consideration regards how discourse determines *conditions of possibility*. This is particularly important for this thesis given the need to examine how

discourses of the ecological crisis become naturalized over time, thereby excluding other discourses that might offer alternative understandings. In this respect, Braun and Wainwright (2001: 42) highlight the usefulness of discourse theory for exploring environmental politics:

> *It forces us to recognize the fundamental openness, or undecidability, of what counts as nature in environmental conflicts, and in turn reveals the urgent need for critical analysis of how the stabilization or normalization of any particular understanding of nature is achieved.*

Drawing from Foucault, discourse is thus dependent on certain socially accepted knowledge regimes that are produced by discursive practices (Hall, 2001). Every utterance, statement, and/or articulation, despite there being infinite possibilities, is produced based on certain 'rules of formation' that limit what is possible and thus govern knowledge. Therefore, as suggested by Hajer (1997: 49): "discourses imply prohibitions since they make it impossible to raise certain questions or argue certain cases." That which evades articulation, or that which is thus considered a non-truth, does not conform to the discourse.

Here Foucault's understanding of power is especially useful, one that emphasizes how power is an inherent part of all social interaction; power does not merely facilitate the construction of the social, it provides the conditions that make the social possible. Power is exercised through discourse, a process that Foucault (1989) in his *The Order of Things* illustrates by highlighting how discourses classify, label and represent social phenomena in particular ways. Power is not exclusively seen in the Marxist sense in terms of its repressive effects. Rather, as argued by Foucault (1980: 119) what makes us accept power is not an authoritarian force that prohibits us from action, but that power "traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression."

Laclau and Mouffe (2001) affirm the political nature of discourse theory by stressing that the construction of meaning (identity) is an outcome of *social antagonism*. This is based on the social never being complete – there will always be a struggle to fix meaning and attain a sense of closure (Laclau 1996). In this vein, Torfing (2005: 15) notes that social antagonism, "involves the exclusion of a threatening Otherness that stabilizes the discursive system while, at the same time, preventing its ultimate closure. […] We have to look for something outside the discourse in order to account for its limits." As such, antagonisms occur when discourses fail to accommodate each other in certain ways, thus exposing the limits of a discursive formation – for instance when subjects fail to reconcile contrasting positons within a discursive field (Laclau, 1988). In this respect, as Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000: 15) suggest, the role of the discourse analysis is to: "explore the different forms of this impossibility and the mechanisms by which the obstruction of identity is constructed by social agents in antagonistic terms." Thereby, the contingency of discursive field becomes evident and discursive struggles unfold that aim to rearticulate and 'fix' the discursive order. This however poses a paradox: whilst the Other discourse is needed, it also poses a threat to destabilize the fixed set of signifying elements: "the constitutive outside has the capacity to put into question the very identity which is constituted through its externalisation" (Waetjen et al., 1997: 122).

To address this impossibility, Laclau and Mouffe radicalize Gramsci's notion of hegemony (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 21). Hegemony is similar to discourse in the sense that it 'fixes' meaning. However, hegemony functions by displacing antagonisms across colliding discourses – where there was once a struggle, hegemony cleverly masks this struggle: "one discourse is undermined from the discursive field from which another discourse overpowers it, or rather dissolves it, by rearticulating its elements" (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 48). Thus, hegemony for Laclau and Mouffe is neither a state, nor a means to an end political strategy, but form part of articulatory practices that subsume conflicting subjectivities into a

common project, thereby accommodating the differences between contrasting discourses. Here, Martin (2002: 25) defines the political function of hegemony:

> *[…] by constructing and constraining common meanings, power and exclusion are an essential feature of hegemony. Dominant discourses succeed by displacing alternative modes of argument and forms of activity; by marginalising radically different discourses; by naturalising their hierarchies and exclusions presenting them in the form of 'common sense'; and by effacing the traces of their own contingency.*

This of course diverges from Gramsci's emphasis on class struggles alone to encompass a broader understanding of hegemonic struggles as a way to 'suture' contesting discourses by articulating a collective identity (Stavrakakis, 1997b). Applied to the context of sustainability, Wittneben et al (2012: 1436) conceptualize hegemony in the following terms: "the deliberate breadth and vagueness of these concepts glosses over contradictions and emphasizes a common interest in both sustainability and economic development." Thereby, combining discourses of endless economic growth and ecological preservation does not seem as absurd when articulated as belonging to the common project of "sustainable development" (Livesey, 2002c; Tregidga et al., 2015).

3.2.3. Discourse as embedded in a cultural context

The third concept underpinning this thesis' approach to discourse is *context*. Discourse does not just 'happen' in a cultural vacuum but is embedded within interactions that occur amongst groups, and within complex social structures (Keenoy et al., 1997; Leitch and Palmer, 2010). Indeed, as Laclau and Mouffe (1987: 86) suggest: "the 'truth', factual or otherwise, about the being of objects is constituted within a theoretical and discursive context, and the idea of a truth outside all context is simply nonsensical." Text and context are thus inseparable. Whilst context determines which sorts of text are legitimate discursive practices, the production and consumption of these texts, to varying degrees determines social contexts (Hardy and Phillips, 1999). Thereby, to examine how discourse functions, context must be taken into consideration. In this respect, van Dijk (1997: 3) notes: "Discourse

studies should deal both with the properties of text and talk and with what is usually called the context, that is, the other characteristics of the social situation or the communicative event that may systematically influence text or talk." In doing so, discourse and social practices become intertwined within specific social and historic contexts.

This gives discourse a 'space' to function; filled with disparate actors competing for definition control (Maguire et al., 2004). Discourse, given its contextual embeddedness, therefore may have varying effects depending on the context within which it is enacted (Keenoy et al., 1997; Leitch and Palmer, 2010; van Dijk, 2001). This has implications for how a discourse is constructed since context determines the other discourses that are drawn from and collectively stitched together to construct a discourse (Fairclough, 2003; Livesey, 2002b). Indeed, discourses of ecologic crisis, given a particular context, are connected to discourses on globalization, environmentalism, capitalism, and sustainable development, amongst others. In this respect, Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 277) note: "Discourse is not produced without context and cannot be understood without taking context into consideration […]. Discourses are always connected to other discourses that were produced earlier, as well as those which are produced synchronically and subsequently." With respect to this thesis, discourses of the global ecological crisis operate within the context of global environmental governance (discussed in Section 4.2). Indeed, this is a much broader context in comparison to, for instance, the context of municipal policy planning in the Shetland Islands where discourses of ecological crisis function differently.

3.2.4. Discourse as having ideological effects

Finally, the fourth important consideration regarding discourse as approached in this thesis are *the effects of discourse*. There are two sorts of effects that are important here. The first is a discursive effect, which is akin to Foucault's 'truth effect' (Knights and Morgan, 1991: 252), and follows from the discussion above regarding the productive function of discourse as it constitutes subjects and objects. The effect in this respect refers to how discourse renders intelligible a certain reality, as proposed by Butler (1993: 187):

> *For discourse to materialize a set of effects, "discourse" itself must be understood as complex and convergent chains in which "effects" are vectors of power. In this sense, what is constituted in discourse is not fixed in or by discourse, but becomes the condition and occasion for a further action. This does not mean that any action is possible on the basis of a discursive effect. On the contrary, certain reiterative chains of discursive production are barely legible as reiterations, for the effects they have materialized are those without which no bearing in discourse can be taken. The power of discourse to materialize its effects is thus consonant with the power of discourse to circumscribe the domain of intelligibility.*

This understanding of effect is rooted in discourse containing its own conditions of possibility that implicate subjectivity. Discourse also functions to legitimate imbalanced relations between those who dominate, and those who are dominated; thereby reproducing a society structured on the basis of inequality and privilege (Keenoy et al., 1997; Mumby, 2004). This is where this my work draws from critical theory's notion of ideological effect (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Purvis and Hunt, 1993).

From a critical theory perspective, language is thus conceptualized not only in terms of discursive practices and social processes, but as a means to an end; discourses are ideologically-laden and used in the service of power (Thompson, 1990). This way, ideology works through discourse "to conceal the radical contingency of social relations and to naturalize relations of domination" (Howarth, 2009: 310). As such, ideology is often a focus of critical discourse studies, which Fairclough (1995a: 135) argues attempts to:

> *[…] systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony.*

A key term used by Fairclough is 'opacity' – in other words, ideology functions as a sort of veil that obfuscates more-real reality. However, this thesis does not entertain the idea that ideology somehow produces a false consciousness in the structuralist Marxist sense. Rather I

am particularly interested in the ideological effects of discursive practices, which "contribute to the production, reproduction or transformations of relations of domination" (Fairclough, 1992: 87). This way, powerful groups maintain understandings of reality that further their particular interests, that are often not in the interest of subordinated groups (Mumby, 2004). As Giddens (1979: 188) suggests: "To analyze the ideological aspects of symbolic orders… is to examine how structures of signification are mobilized to legitimate the sectional interests of hegemonic groups." In many ways climate change poses a threat to the discursive order given that it radically challenges "not only established assumptions of social and economic activity, but also our understanding of ourselves as individuals, our social roles and identities" (Wright et al., 2012b: 1452). Therefore, how organizations engage with issues surrounding the natural environment is ideologically driven in that there are competing, or even contradicting, ideological discourses that underpin much of the organizational discourse on, for instance, climate change.

3.2.5. Components of discourse

I now turn to a discussion of several key components associated with discourse theory that I draw on in the four articles: articulation, object, subject, field of discursivity, and the extra-discursive and the Real, as illustrated in Figure 2.

3.2.5.1. Practices of articulation

Articulation regards practices by which discourses are constructed thereby establishing "a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 105). Such practices can be both socio-symbolic and/or explicitly discursive (the production and consumption of text and other more general forms of representation). Indeed, discourse is not limited to text. As Laclau (Laclau, 1980: 87) proposes: "[by] 'discursive' I do not mean that which refers to 'text' narrowly defined, but to the ensemble of the phenomena in and through which social production of meaning takes

place, an ensemble which constitutes a society as such." The articles presented in this thesis emphasize different practices of articulation.

3.2.5.2. Objects of knowledge

Objects refer to the products of articulation – knowledge, theories, 'regimes of truth' etc. Objects are intersubjective meanings assigned to material referents and abstract concepts – i.e., the image that comes to mind when something is referenced (Phillips and Hardy, 1997). Therefore, objects are not actual things but the identity of things that are continuously produced as a result of articulation (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). For instance, a rise in temperature is not an object until it becomes meaningful through its articulation as "global warming." Similarly, an abstract concept such as "sustainability" can mean something very different depending on whether it is constituted as object for economy, or object of ecology. In relation to this thesis, I examine how discourses of the global ecological crisis constitute objects of knowledge such as "sustainable development" (Article I); "climate change" (Articles II, III, IV); and "fossil fuel divestment" (Article IV)

3.2.5.3. Subject positions

Subjects speak within discourse and are not at autonomous agents. When an individual or organization expresses itself, it does so through an acquired subjectivity; hence subjects cannot escape the discourse. As Hardy and Phillips (1999: 4), for instance, note, "statements within a discourse are not produced by independently acting subjects but, rather, help to position and produce the subject in the context of the particular discourse." In this respect, a core tenet of modernity – individuals as autonomous free-agents – is called into question. Refuting the concept of a self-governing individual begs the question: If I am not the author of myself, then what and who is? (Calás and Smircich, 1999). In discourse theory, the subject is decentered from its own constitution; instead stressing that it is through discourse that subject comes to be: "the self no longer uses language to express itself; rather language speaks through the person" (Kvale, 1992: 36). Whenever someone 'acts' they are merely setting into

motion a reaction within a chain of signifiers that all interact and re-constitute reality of that person claiming to possess intentionality (Willmott, 2005: 752) . The role of the subject herein is limited in a sense since subjects always operate within the framework that is discourse. Discourse is therefore both an expression of ideas and opinions (van Dijk, 2011), as it is "performative, in that it exerts influence on audiences and affects how reality is perceived" (Chelli and Gendron, 2012: 189). However, this does not mean that agency is downplayed. Rather, subjects 'move' within the structures that form part of the discursive order.

That discourse both constrains and enables is somewhat comparable to the popular sociological structure-agency dualism are proposed for instance by Giddens (1984). Indeed, as Giddens highlights, discourse is not, although it may be, omnipotent; whether the subject can 'do otherwise' is axiomatic. The main focus however is not whether and how actors shape social structure or discourse, but the mechanisms, practices and tactics that are enacted by discoursing subjects, and the effects thereof (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2003; Hardy et al., 2000a). It is therefore important that every discursive action is contingent on other actions, and thereby excludes other possibilities for action (Calás and Smircich, 1999; Cooper and Burrell, 1988b). This way, whilst agency is both product and effect of discourse, it does not ignore the effect of agency, which is important because "understanding how the subject is constituted in discourse requires attention to the social processes through which people actively manoeuvre in relation to discursive practices" (Newton, 1998: 428).

Whenever a role is assumed—e.g., 'I am an environmentalist'—the self assumes a subject position of "environmentalist" that is pre-allocated within the discourse. Therefore, "an environmentalist" is not *actually* a person, but the symbolic scripts (or baggage) that a person has assumed and performs (e.g., Hall, 1985: 108). In this thesis, I consider multiple subject positions, including, as indicated in Figure 2, "sustainable business" (Article I, II, III) and 'climate activist' (Article IV), amongst others.

These subject positions emerge as soon as subjects take up voice – i.e., they assume their language role within a discursive system (Hardy and Phillips, 1999). However, not all subject positions are equally weighted in terms of their right to speak, as Mills (2003: 65) for instance suggests: "Not everyone is able to make statements, or have statements taken seriously by others. Some statements are more authorised than others, in that they are more associated with those in positions of power or with institutions." Whatever statement follows is thus produced independently from the individual author, rather belonging to the subject's identification with predetermined set of statements that are positioned within a particular discourse. In this respect, Hardy and Phillips (1999: 4) note that: "statements within a discourse are not produced by independently acting subjects but, rather, help to position and to produce the subject in the context of the particular discourse."

Importantly, the subject is decentered or fragmented – it does not ascribe to one subject position alone, but is often interpellated with multiple subject positions, some of which might be at odds with one another (Knights and Morgan, 1991; Newton, 1998). The subject positions "environmentalist," "business executive," and "mother," for example, may be inconsistent, which results in the subject being *overdetermined* (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 113). Laclau and Mouffe (2001) go on to argue that the subject is fundamentally "split" – always striving for a sense of wholeness. Because this cannot be achieved—i.e., the discourse is never closed off completely—subjects experience a perpetual state of overdetermination; nothing objective forces the subject to adopt only one position. In instances where the subject fails to realize the tension between positions it is because these have been excluded from the field of discursivity; thereby the subject sees only what is already naturalized (Howarth, 1991). This is the ideological effect of discourse.

3.2.5.4. Discursive order

A *discursive order*, which is drawn from Fairclough (1992: 93), concerns the sum of all the discourses—both those which are dominant and those that are subordinated—that belong to a specific context, or social domain. Article I in particular operates within this discursive

limit; here, the discursive order belongs to the context of transnational sustainable development policy arena. Competing discourses are contained within the order, discourses bound together by established 'rules of the game'; hence, a discursive order is ordered by the power imbalances that regulate the social domain, as Fairclough (1995b: 38) argues:

> *Each institution has its own set of speech events, its own differentiated settings and scenes, its cast of participants, and its own norms for their combination […] it provides [members] with a frame for action, without which they could not act, but it thereby constrains them to act within that frame*

A discursive order, given that it is context bound, cannot produce totalizing discourse, or hegemony. For instance, using the example of Article I, discourse surrounding transnational sustainable development policy does not encapsulate the discourse of sustainable development since other discourses—e.g., space travel—are excluded because of contextual limitations. Although "space travel" might seem irrelevant to the discourse of sustainable development, a discourse theory perspective argues that everything that is excluded is relevant because this is how a discourse sets the limits of what is considered normal, and what is not. Certain orders of discourse become naturalized to the point where excluded discourses remain marginalized and considered to be absurd (Hajer, 1997); nuclear energy, for instance, is excluded from the discourse on alternative energy in some fields, whilst being considered legitimate in others.

3.2.5.5. Field of discursivity

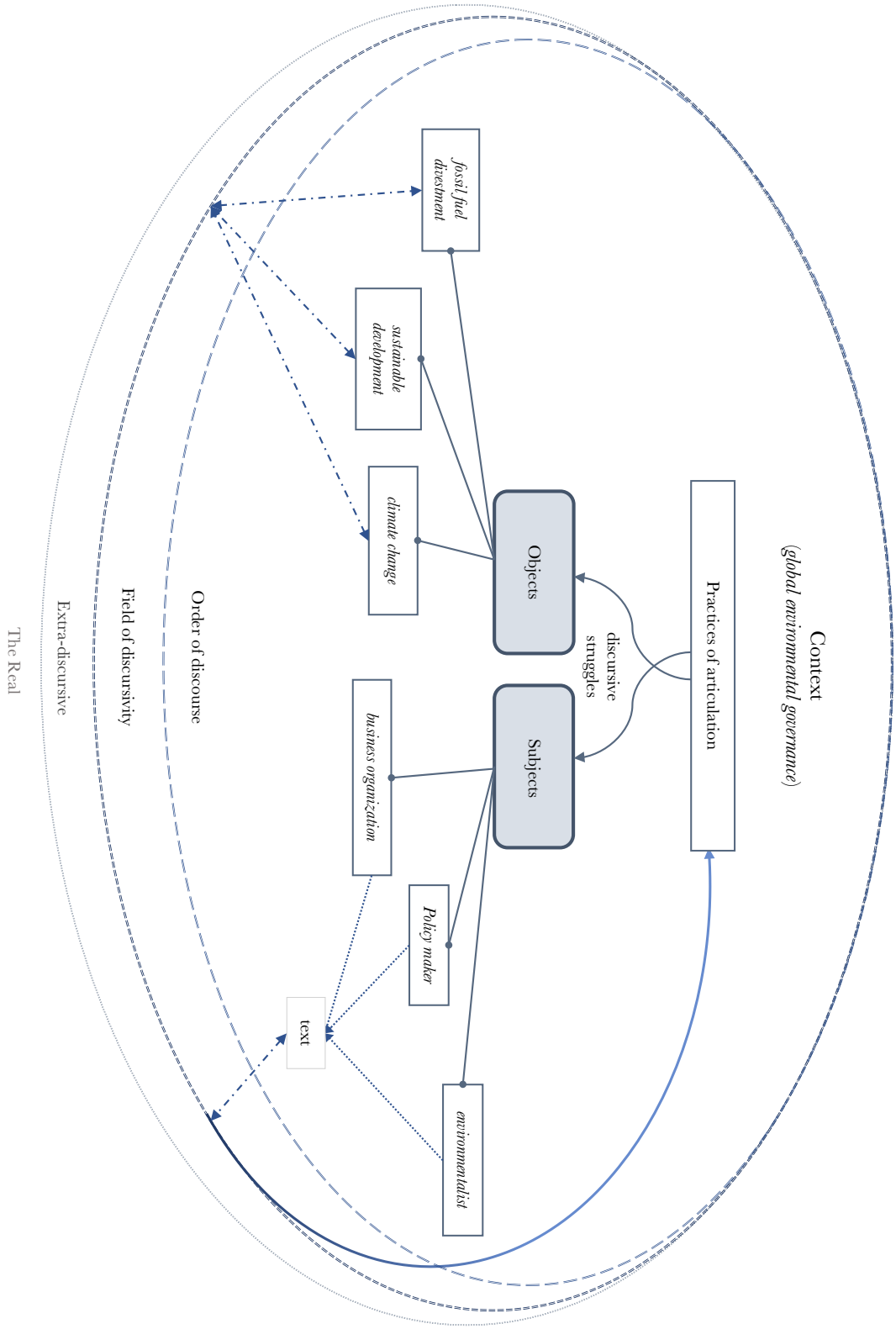
The *field of discursivity*, which is sometimes referred to simply as *the discursive* (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001), encompasses the entire "surplus of meaning" that is excluded from the discourse (Torfing, 1999: 92). As Laclau and Mouffe argue: "Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a center" (2001: 112). The field of discursivity is also the point at which a discourse sets its totalizing limits, or where it attempts to define itself (Smith, 1998). However, the field of discursivity is empirically difficult to study precisely because it is all-encompassing; this is

also a limitation with respect to operationalizing poststructuralist theory for research purposes (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). As such, this thesis examines discursive struggles that occur within a discursive order, or specific context.

3.2.5.6. Extra-discursive and Real

The *extra-discursive* has no constitutive effect on our understanding of the world (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 110); it refers to the material realm that has yet to be given an identity. This realm is important because, as I argue below, it recognizes a material existence beyond human consciousness, and helps avoid philosophical idealism (Willmott, 2005). *The Real* is a term borrowed from Lacanian psychoanalysis and regards a subconscious symbolic space that cannot be symbolized (Jones and Spicer, 2005; Stavrakakis, 1997a). The Real is distinguished from the extra-discursive in that, whereas representing the extra-discursive matter is always possible, representation of the real is impossible; it is "both the hard, impenetrable kernel resisting symbolization and a pure chimerical entity which has in itself no ontological consistency. [It is] the rock upon which every attempt at symbolization stumbles" (Žižek, 1986: 190). I use this concept in Article III when referring to the way climate change forces a confrontation with the Real.

Figure 2 - Components of discourse theory



3.3. Organizations as constituted discursively

Organization is the third major theoretical component of thesis. Following from the previous section on discourse theory, organization is conceptualized as an effect of language (Westwood and Linstead, 2001: 5). Whilst organizational life may be contained within a physical structure such as an office building, or a in symbolic form in terms of a company logo, these are less relevant for my analysis compared to the discursive practices through which organizational structures are constituted, as Mumby and Clair (1997: 181) assert:

> *Organizations exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse. This is not to claim that organizations are 'nothing but' discourse, but rather that discourse is the principal means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are.*

Organizations are thus conceptualized both in terms of their expressive and oppressive functions – as a "culture-bearing milieu" through which power is exercised (Louis, 1983: 39). In the discussion that follows, I outline the two main tenets of this perspective: organizational symbolism and its critical application.

3.3.1. Organizational symbolism

Organizational symbolism foregrounds symbols as the primary means of articulating organizational life, values, and ideology (Alvesson, 1991; Dandridge et al., 1980; Pondy et al., 1983). This understanding of organization differs from the dominant approach in organization and management scholarship in which organizations, and their members, are mainly conceptualized as rational economic agents (Cooper, 1989). In this respect, management scholars study organizations from a functionalist approach, focusing mainly on "objectively identifiable processes and relationship" (Dandridge et al., 1980: 69). However, this oversimplified understanding of organizations neglects the complexity, fluidity, and 'humanness' of organizational life. In response, organization studies experienced a 'cultural turn' throughout the 1980s that emphasized symbolic meaning-making processes as integral to organizational life, as Pondy and Mitroff (1979: 28) suggest: "[…] an organization would

not be possible without considering the symbolic and expressive functions of language." In short, language is a key element in moving toward a cultural metaphor of organization.

All organizational phenomena are imbued with meaning through symbols, or "objects, acts, concepts, or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of disparate meanings, evoke sentiments and emotions and impel men [*sic*] to action" (Cohen, 1974: ix). Such symbols include an array of corporate artefacts such as annual reports, brands, stories, myths, rituals, and ceremonies. Collectively, these signifiers construct organizational culture, which Alvesson (2004: 319) defines as: "a shared and learned world of experiences, meanings, values, and understandings which inform people and which are expressed, reproduced, and communicated partly in symbolic form." Organizations are therefore systems of meanings that are continuously renegotiated subjectively, and cannot be experienced through a predetermined objectiveness (Boyce, 1996). Underpinning the focus on organizational symbolism—in line with the discussion in the previous chapter—is language (Smircich, 1983). It therefore comes to no surprise that the emerging emphasis on organizational symbolism coincides with the linguistic turn in social sciences (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000; Pondy et al., 1983). Indeed, it is through language that an organization transmits symbols; likewise, for organizational members to create shared symbolic meaning they must communicate. However, missing from concept of organizational symbolism is power (with few notable exceptions, e.g., Alvesson, 1991); an all-pervasive, decentered power as discussed in the previous section (3.2). Thus, organization studies took yet another turn (more of a slight bend this time) toward *discourse*, as informed by postmodernism (Alvesson, 1995; Chia, 1995; Cooper and Burrell, 1988; Knights, 1997; Parker, 1992) and critical theory (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Mumby, 2004). The *esprit de corps* is poignantly captured by Cooper and Burrell (1988a: 101):

> *In order to see the ordinary with a fresh vision, we have to make it 'extraordinary', i.e., to break the habits of organized routine and see the world as though for the first time, it is necessary to free ourselves of normalized ways of thinking that blind us to the strangeness of the familiar.*

3.3.2. Postmodernism and critical theory

The theory that organizations are constituted by discourse stems largely from a "concern for language and representation and a reconsideration of subjectivity and power" (Calás and Smircich, 1999: 649). A direct challenge to a positivist hegemony, this movement recognizes the usefulness of language as the primary means of social construction, including the construction of organizations. Whilst there is certainly a clear distinction between postmodernism in organizational studies and critical theory there are also fruitful overlaps, as Alvesson and Deetz (2006: 255) propose:

> *Each provide enriched conceptions of power, demonstrate the value of including the representation of diverse interests and bring to the surface suppressed conflict for the sake of reconsideration. Critical and postmodern studies have shown how managerial values embedded in language systems, social practices and decision routines have lessened the quality of organizational decisions and reduced the capacity to meet important human needs.*

All organizational phenomena, based on this perspective, can thus be read in terms of an embeddedness within discourse – the role of discourse analysis is to explore how these discursive patters emerge, including their power effects (Knights and Morgan, 1991; Maguire et al., 2004). That meaning within organizations is constructed then raises questions as to *how* exactly meaning is manifested and through which discursive practices (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000). This has led to an examination of several discursive practices – e.g., stories (Brown, 1985; Clair, 1993), rituals (Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983; Putnam, 1983); metaphors (Morgan, 1983; Putnam and Boys, 2006); and myths (Bowles, 1989).

The debate on postmodernism and organizations resonates, in particular, with critical management studies (CMS, see also Section 5.3 regarding the business-as-critically-explored

conversation). Here scholars argue that organizations are constructed in such a way that subjects become 'trapped' by a narrowly defined corporatized reality. Further, CMS is underpinned by a radical/emancipatory orientation, as the unofficial CMS (Pollard, 2016) website states:

> *CMS is a largely left-wing and theoretically informed approach to management and organisation studies. It challenges the prevailing conventional understanding of work, management and organisations. CMS provides a platform for debating radical alternatives whilst interrogating the established relations of power, control, domination and ideology as well as the relations among organisations, society and people.*

Organization is thus often framed around notions such as: "corporate colonization" (Deetz, 1992); "tightening the iron cage" (Barker, 1993: 408); "site of control and resistance" (Mumby, 2005); or "psychic prisons" (Morgan, 1997). Regarding the latter, Morgan draws from Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, arguing that organizations are: "[…] ultimately created and sustained by conscious and unconscious processes, with the notion that people actually become imprisoned in or confined by the images, ideas, thoughts, and actions to which these processes give rise" (1997: 217).

Discursive approaches are often employed as a fruitful tool for 'ideology critique', mainly to address "the cultural and symbolic processes through which capitalism is produced and reproduced" (Mumby, 2011: 606) This is especially the case regarding employee relations and worker struggles, which is usually approached from post-Marxist or neo-Gramscian perspectives (Contu et al., 2013). In this vein, organizations are largely considered repressive given that "the defining essence of the capitalist labor process is the simultaneous securing and obscuring of surplus value" (Burawoy, 1979: 30). Similarly, as Alvesson (1991: 261) illustrates, managers – knowingly or unknowingly – manipulate symbolic systems: "Symbols are consequently viewed as aspects of organizations possessing the potential to be exploited and subordinated to the intentions of various organizational actors, especially top managers." For instance, managerial discourses of "mindfulness at work" and "employee

happiness," from a critical perspective, obfuscate the hidden meanings beneath—increased productivity and thereby exploitation of workers by the capitalist class (Alvesson and Willmott, 2012). This 'real' meaning is exposed by a careful reading of discursive practices that constitute subjects as "model employee."

Relatedly, a critical understanding of organizations informed by discourse theory emphasizes the expressly political character organizational life as embedded within power struggles (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Ybema et al., 2009). Again, Foucault features prominently (discussed in Section 3.2.2). Power within organizations is often theorized as normalized and routine; attained not through coercion but articulated through consensual social relations within organizational contexts (Mumby, 1988). This occurs through everyday practices, which Clegg (1989: 183) formulates by arguing:

> *To the extent that meanings become fixed or reified in certain forms, which then articulate particular practices, agents and relations, this fixity is power. Power is the apparent order of taken-for-granted categories of existence, as they are fixed and represented in a myriad discursive forms and practices. Power is neither ethical nor micropolitical; above all it is textual, semiotic, and inherent in the very possibility of textuality, meaning and signification in the social.*

Of particular emphasis are organizational subjectivities (Calás and Smircich, 1999; Newton, 1998). Organizational members are controlled as corporatized subjects. Accordingly, members of an organization are subjectified within systems of power-knowledge relations. As previously discussed, discourse rules in what is acceptable and possible with a certain organizational setting, and what is not. Thus, whether "secretary" or "chief financial officer," these subject positions are performed in accordance with the way power is exercised through discourse. For instance, the discourse of the modern corporation constitutes social relations so that, in ascribing to this discourse, the secretary is subjectified as inferior vis-à-vis the CFO who, in turn, experiences a sense of omnipotence given the 'naturalness' of this unequal relationship (Knights and Morgan, 1991). Here, Chia (2000: 514) suggests, with respect to the role of discourse in constituting this naturalness, that "discourse acts at a far more

constitutive level to form social objects such as 'organizations' by circumscribing selected parts of the flux of phenomenal experiences and fixing their identity so that it becomes possible to talk about them as if they were naturally existing social entities."

As this relationship is reproduced as 'truth' through social practices over time, the discourse of the modern corporation shapes organizational habits and routines, which, in turn, develops a self-legitimizing function. Thus, discursive practices "do not simply provide a context for the exercise of power over organizational members, but rather function as a form of discipline which, within a particular power-knowledge regime, constitutes organization members in a certain manner" (Mumby and Stohl, 1991: 316) Organization life reproduces relations of domination as certain objects of knowledge acquire a taken-for-grantedness that are illustrated by their ideological effects. In most cases, however, such effects operate under the surface, thereby restricting organizations for realizing alternative ways of being (Fournier and Grey, 2000; Gibson-Graham, 1996).

In sum, the above discussion regarding this thesis' conceptual framework suggests that nature, discourse, and organization intersect in theoretically intriguing ways. Indeed, these conceptual overlaps (see Figure 1) are especially useful for addressing this thesis' main objective, which is to explore how the business-nature relationship is constituted by discursive struggles surrounding the ecological crisis. However, these struggles do not occur separately from a context. In the next section, I address this point by discussing the 'space' in which the ecological crisis is defined as a crisis – *global environmental governance*.

CHAPTER 4 – SITUATING THIS STUDY WITHIN A CONTEXT

The following chapter situates this thesis' conceptual framework (Chapter 3) within the context of global environmental governance. This involves first presenting a (very) brief history regarding the unfolding relationship between corporations and the natural environment over the past 60 years. I show how this relationship was first defined through *reactive* compliance; then by *proactively* incorporating the environment into corporate structures; and finally, today, as part of a firm's *political* capacity. Thereafter, I discuss the significance of this political role within the context of global environmental governance.

4.1. The business-nature relationship

Whilst the relationship between business and the natural environment is longstanding (Post, 2012), environmental issues first became a serious social, political and economic concern for business from the 1960s onwards[5] (Bansal and Hoffman, 2012). This stemmed largely from the emergence of the modern environmentalist movement; a development that resulted in tightening environmental legislation in the US. A catalyst here was Rachel Carson's seminal *Silent Spring*, which documented the harmful effects both on environmental and human systems of using synthetic pesticides, notably dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), for agricultural use (Carson, 1962: 197):

> *As crude a weapon as the cave man's club, the chemical barrage has been hurled against the fabric of life - a fabric on the one hand delicate and destructible, on the other miraculously tough and resilient, and capable of striking back in unexpected ways. These extraordinary capacities of life have been ignored by the practitioners of chemical control who have brought to their task no "high-minded orientation," no humility before the vast forces with which they tamper.*

Carson, a marine biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, placed serious doubt in the minds of the American public regarding the virtues of technological progress, and

[5] It is important to note that this refers to the unfolding relationship between business and the natural environment from a Western (mostly US) perspective.

likewise with regard to the vulnerability of eco-systems. Carson vividly portrays an American town emptied of life, where streets are characterized by a deafening silence, void of birdsong and the laughing of children, all due to deadly effects of DDT (Maguire and Hardy, 2009). Carson's thesis attracted the attention of large publics – it was published in the New York Times and President Kennedy launched a special investigation that confirmed validity of her claims. Chemical producers such as Dow Chemical and Monsanto responded with public shaming campaigns discrediting Carson, coupled with also taking extensive legal action to prevent further studies. A spokesperson of the American Cyanamid Company for example stating that, "If man [sic] were to faithfully follow the teachings of Miss Carson, we would return to the Dark Ages, and the insects and diseases and vermin would once again inherit the earth" (Walsh, 2012).

Yet the efforts of industry were overshadowed by a growing distain sparked by the increasingly influential environmentalist movement. This in turn led to several developments that thrusted concern for the natural environment onto many corporate boards, including, amongst others: the forming of the Environmental Protection Agency, which formulated the Clear Air Act, Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act (Hoffman and Georg, 2012; Kolk and Pinkse, 2005). Finally, a tipping point occurred in 1970 when, in response to the Santa Barbara oil spill that occurred a year earlier, the first Earth Day was held and attended by 20 million people (Keeble, 1999). At this point in time, Jimmy Hendrix had passed away, the Beatles released their final album, Simon and Garfunkel split, and Nixon began withdrawing troops from Vietnam – for many, environmentalism provided a new fight, a new cause, a new identity. In Europe, similar trends emerged, such as the establishment of Club of Rome, consisting of economists and scientists that aimed to analyze the worrying relationship between industry activity, environmental degradation, population growth, and the use of natural resources (Meadows et al., 1972). The UN also held its first environmental summit in 1972 - the Human Environment Conference in 1972. Fittingly, corporations felt the pressure, perceiving environmentalism as directly threatening their economic success.

Businesses were either reactive and regarded environmental regulation as a matter of having to comply, or proactive by directly challenging lawmakers and environmental groups in court. Accordingly, during this "regulatory compliance period" governments and publics insistent that companies should be controlled by hard law (Hoffman, 2001a: 261). Corporate America had little choice – technical positions such as 'environmental compliance manager' were created in order to deal with environmental issues.

Later, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, business became increasingly proactive in their management of environmental issues. Instead of mere compliance, the natural environment became into a strategic concern for many firms. Of particular importance are two events that initiated the idea corporations must be held accountable for their actions and that publics have "the right to know." The first concerns the Bhopal disaster that occurred in India in 1984 where a gas leak occurred in a chemical plant operated by Union Carbide Corporation (today called the Dow Chemical Company) resulting in the emitting of methyl isocyanate gas and other highly toxic chemicals. The government of Madhya Pradesh officially stated in 2006 that the industrial disaster resulted in the injuring of 558,125 people, of which 3,787 died (Rajesh, 2012). This event—considered the worst industrial disaster in history—directly implicated an American company despite the incident not occurring on US soil. The then Chairman and CEO of Union Carbide, Warren Anderson, was charged with manslaughter (he fled India and never turned up for trial) and the company was sued for damages in excess of $470 million. Several members of Union Carbide's Indian operation currently remain in prison. Union Carbide's share price tumbled at the time and led to a hostile takeover attempt by GAF Corporation. Today, Dow Chemical Company continues facing legal action by the victims of the accident. The second incident regards the Exxon Valdez oil spill, which occurred on March 24, 1989 off the south coast of Alaska (Keeble, 1999). Hitting a reef, the oil tanker owned by the Exxon Shipping Company spilled 10.8 million gallons of crude oil into the ocean. The National Transportation Safety Board, in their review of the incident, attributed fault to Exxon, arguing that the company did not ensure the

maintenance of their collision avoidance system radar, and because Exxon overworked the vessel's crew members. Like Bhopal, the immediate and most direct consequence was that Exxon faced legal action. Yet, the Valdez incident had wider ramifications on a symbolic level largely due to the images of sea birds, seals and sea otters covered in suffocating black, sticky oil (Elsbach, 1994).

It was during this period that concern for the natural environment entered the international political arena. Several key developments are important, notably the publication of the Brundtland Commission's report, *Our Common Future*, which produced the famous definition of sustainable development (WCED, 1987) as:

> *[…] development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.*

This period also included, amongst others: the signing and ratification of the Montreal Protocol in 1987 which aimed to stop substances that caused ozone depletion; the UN's forming of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988; and finally, the first Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Given the heightened status of the natural environment on the international political stage, corporations responded swiftly. This includes large-scale moves by major corporations to incorporate nature into management systems. As Bansal and Hoffman (2012: 4) remark:

> *The environmental department enjoyed new levels of organizational power, and environmental considerations began to be pushed into the line operations, integrating them into both processes and product decisions. Concepts like waste minimization, pollution prevention, and product stewardship entered the corporate lexicon.*

Instead of hostility towards the natural environment as a regulatory annoyance, corporations would increasingly find ways to consider issues surrounding the natural environment as a

strategic concern; notably resulting in, what is now become ubiquitous, the sustainability report. That environmentalism can generate substantial profit became, at the dawn of the 21st century, increasingly accepted – evidenced by major corporations acquiring smaller companies such as The Body Shop (acquired by L'Oréal) and Ben & Jerry's (acquired by Unilever) which had successfully targeted niche eco-consumer segments.

Today, corporate engagement with the natural environment is in most cases considered as part of a firm's overarching sustainability agenda. Companies have broadened their scope to include a large variety of issues that extend far beyond the immediate ecological impacts of the firm (Whelan, 2013). Companies not only claim to be considerate of financial, ecological and social concerns, but engage topics that require a particular moral and political sensitivity (Moon et al., 2005; Scherer et al., 2013; Scherer and Palazzo, 2008, 2011). National security, poverty, human rights, religious freedom, right-wing authoritarianism, big-data and information protection are all enmeshed into a firm's disclosures (Scherer, 2017). CEOs not only attend major environmental conferences, notably the Earth Summits (Article I) and UN Conference of Parties, but speak confidently at political summits such as the World Economic Form about a whole range of social and environmental issue (e.g., Ruddick, 2016). It almost seems standard practice for CEOs to reflect publically about political decisions, as evidenced by responses of several CEOs regarding the decision by US president Donald Trump to dismantle the EPA (Worland, 2017a). This differs from corporations' long-standing commitment to a market-based, commercial mandate. These developments suggest that the role of the firm as a political actor should be taken seriously (Wilks, 2013). I do so in the next section by illustrating firms' political role with respect to global environmental governance.

4.2. Global environmental governance

This thesis is concerned with the context of global environmental governance, which contains various transnational constellations that claim authority over matters surrounding

the global ecological crisis. Global environmental governance is akin to Levy's (Levy and Newell, 2005; Newell, 2005) 'climate regime', defined as (Jones and Levy, 2007: 438):

> *[…] a relatively loose system of international governance involving significant contestation as well as collaboration among states, firms, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and multilateral institutions […]. Within this system, states act as economic agents concerned about their 'competitiveness', while firms are important political actors with significant policy influence.*

Adding to Levy's definition, global environmental governance includes the implicit rules, norms and processes that are embedded within transnational governance systems (e.g., Bäckstrand, 2008). Although operating across local, regional and national borders, global environmental governance is concentrated around "global power arenas" including, in particular, the UN and its affiliated institutions (Meckling, 2011; Okereke et al., 2009). As Levy indicates above, whilst national state interests are salient—often driving international treaties and agreements—global environmental governance is characterized by multi-actor networks. Thus, it is not only states but also non-states that take part in global environmental governance (Kell, 2012; Morgan, Gomes, and Perez-Aleman, 2016). The development of this new geopolitical reality is framed by Haas (2002: 3) as the:

> *[…] proliferation of new political actors and the diffusion of political authority over major governance functions, particularly in the environmental sphere. These new actors include NGOs, MNCs, organized transnational scientific networks known as epistemic communities, global policy networks, and selective international institutions that are capable of exercising discretionary behavior independently of the wishes of their dominant member states.*

The role of companies—especially multinational enterprises—has increasingly become important because global environmental governance directly implicates business in two major ways. First, throughout the value chain, business activity consumes large amounts of energy and produces a significant proportion of pollution and waste (Leonard, 2006). Therefore, the outcomes of global environmental governance, for instance related to

emissions standards, may drastically implicate business activity (Kolk and Pinkse, 2005). Second, it is widely recognized by the international political community that businesses are potential drivers of large scale change given their financial resources (Annan, 2002; Clapp, 2005; Levy and Kolk, 2002; Utting, 2005). Taken together, business has become an integral part of global environmental governance. Indeed, as the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC, 1995) states:

> *Industry's involvement is a critical factor in the policy deliberations relating to climate change. It is industry that will meet the growing demands of consumers for goods and services. It is industry that develops and disseminates most of the world's technology. It is industry and the private financial community that marshal most of the financial resources that fund the world's economic growth. It is industry that develops, finances and manages most of the investments that enhance and protect the environment. It is industry, therefore, that will be called upon to implement and finance a substantial part of governments' climate change policies.*

Whilst business traditionally influenced environmental policy making covertly—especially with regard to lobbying and campaign donations (Juniper, 2002a; Wilks, 2013)—this has changed considerably. Today, business overtly engages in global environmental governance as an active co-producer of environmental policy alongside state and non-state actors (Brammer et al., 2012; Hajer and Versteeg, 2005). The mechanisms by which companies engage in global environmental governance is expansive, ranging from industry initiated voluntary codes of conduct and labels such as the chemical industry's Responsible Care initiative, to working closely with state actors via public-private partnerships (Plahe and van Der Gaag, 2014). There has also been a remarkable proliferation of self-regulating industry associations that collectively attempt to steer the global environmental governance agenda (Levy et al., 2016; Vogel, 2010). This both includes groups that have played an important role since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, such as the WBCSD, and new alliances such as the Oil and Gas Climate Initiative (OGCI), which consists of several companies that collectively supply approximately 10% of the world's energy including BP, Shell and Total (Carrington,

2016b). The OGCI (2015) on its website declares itself as "a CEO-led, voluntary, oil and gas industry initiative that aims to catalyze practical action on climate change through best practice sharing and collaboration." These developments are significant in the sense that they reorder the role of corporations within international environmental policy making. As Fuchs and Knebel (2014: 18) suggest: "The growing visibility of corporations in global environmental governance […] indicates an acquisition of political authority and legitimacy without precedent."

This thesis considers global environmental governance as a macro-level power arena in which discursive struggles occur amongst business, civil society, industry associations, nation state actors, and international organizations (Newell, 2008). By focusing on this context, I stress the contested and contingent nature of environmental governance structures across regional, national, and international levels (Okereke et al., 2009). This is based on the notion that political activity of firms, despite potentially motivated by material/market concerns, are also deeply symbolic, and thereby discursive. As such, global environmental governance draws from political economy approaches to international environmental policy. In this respect, Levy and Newell (2005) for instance adopt a neo-Gramscian perspective to theorize the economic, discursive, and organizational processes that constitute global governance. Levy and Newell (2005: 8) propose that this approach builds "a conceptual bridge between the microlevel analysis of strategic interactions among firms, governments, NGOs, and international organizations, and more macrolevel analysis of the emerging system for global environmental governance." However, it is important to mention that, whilst a political economy approach to global environmental governance (Levy and Egan, 2003; Wittneben et al., 2012) engages with the concept of global governance on economic, discursive, and organizational levels, I am interested in a discursive interpretation of global environmental governance and thus do not discriminate between dimensions (as discussed in Section 3.2). This approach is useful for this thesis for two key reasons.

First, instead of a limited contextual focus, a political economy approach to global environmental governance stresses the importance of seizing definitional control of a particular "locus of governance authority" (Levy and Kaplan, 2008: 446). Therefore, global environmental governance is not necessarily a physical space, institution, or protocol; instead it may be theorized as a politically charged discursive arena (Levy and Egan, 1998, 2003). Global environmental governance is thus not shaped solely by market dynamics and the enforced power of states, but as Wittneben et al (2012: 1437) emphasize, by the "cultural politics where the exercise of power becomes 'rationalized'." Important here are the discursive processes and mechanisms that influence social relations within global environmental governance. Peet (2002: 57), for example, proposes a Foucauldian-Gramscian notion of "globally hegemonic discourse," defined as a: "system of political ideas, derived from leading class interpretations of regional experiences, elaborated in coherent, sequential theoretical statements, as with policy formulations, within internationally recognized bodies of experts." It is through these discursive processes and mechanisms that environmental governance normalizes certain understandings of environmental issues as "common sense" (Cox, 1983; Martin, 2002).

Second, this approach helps situate, or 'map out', political relations within the context of global environmental governance (Okereke et al., 2009). Here, neo-Gramscian perspectives emphasize how coalitions are formed within a 'historical bloc', which refers to, as Gill (2003: 58) suggest: "an historical congruence between material forces, institutions and ideologies, or broadly, an alliance of different class forces politically organized around a set of hegemonic ideas that gave strategic direction and coherence to its constituent elements." This illustrates how global environmental governance is maintained through coalitions between actors that coalesce in an alliance around a common meaning system, or set of articulations (Levy and Egan, 2003; Spicer and Sewell, 2010). In doing so, the historic bloc, including its powerholders, reproduce hegemonic order by coopting or accommodating threats (Nyberg et al., 2013). In this respect, environmental issues such as climate change are considered a

'crisis of hegemony' given that "business face a realignment of interests that threatens powerful sectors with a loss of autonomy, influence and market control" (Levy, 1997: 130). In such cases, discursive order must be rearranged. Similar to the way agency was conceptualized in Section 3.2.2, a neo-Gramscian perspective emphasizes how subjects strategically maneuver and reconfigure social relations within the limits of discourse (Mumby, 1997).

Overall, as I have discussed above, global environmental governance provides a unique context in which organizations—both state and non-state, profit and not-for-profit—struggle for a power position to define global environmental issues. This space exemplifies the sort of symbolic battlefield where corporations increasingly flex their muscle as political actors. As already mentioned, the political role of corporations with respect to global environmental governance forms part of the literature on organizations and the natural environment, which is also where I intend to make a theoretical contribution. In the next section, I discuss this literature in more detail.

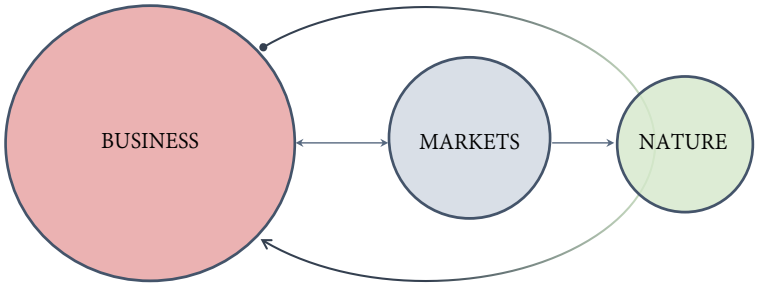
CHAPTER 5 – SITUATING THIS STUDY WITHIN A CONVERSATION

Literature concerning organizations and the natural environment generally concerns one of three conversations, which I have categorized as: business-as-forever-usual; business-as-little-less-than-usual; and business-as-critically-explored. This grouping is by no means exhaustive or definitive – scholars and their ideas often straddle conversations. Likewise, this thesis does not operate solely within a particular camp. As I will detail in Section 5.4, the sequence of papers produced during this PhD project traverse the business-as-little-less-than-usual and business-as-explored-critically conversations. I do not contribute to the business-as-forever-usual conversation, for reasons that might be obvious given the critically-inclined focus of my thesis. It is important to mention that by including key literatures within each conversation, other literatures are obviously excluded. Whilst these are certainly important for the overarching debate business-nature relationship, I aim to incorporate only those literatures that facilitate directly in problematizing the current body of work regarding organizations and the natural environment, and thus this thesis's potential contribution.

5.1. Business-as-forever-usual

The business-as-forever-usual conversation approaches the natural environment from a neoclassical theory of the firm perspective (Friedman, 1970; McWilliams and Siegel, 2000). I include the term 'forever' because this conversation is faithfully entrenched in a dogmatic obsession with free-markets and economic growth (Banerjee, 2012b); escape is unlikely or indeed understood as unnecessary. As depicted in Figure 3., there is a one-way relationship between business and nature; mediated either by economic markets, or by direct exploitation

Figure 3 - Depiction of business-as-forever-usual conversation



The business-as-forever-usual conversation places emphasis on creating shareholder wealth irrespective of ecological sustainability is emphasized; environmental regulation is perceived as a direct threat to profitability (Jensen and Meckling, 1976). Indeed, as Purser et al (1995: 1078) suggest, the business-as-forever-usual conversation is "concerned with searching for better means to engineer and control nature for instrumental purposes." Business organizations are separated from other types of organization (e.g., society, state, family etc.) as relations between economic agents occur principally through market transactions. Issues surrounding the natural environment are considered an 'externality': "[the] economy is a closed linear system, isolated from nature, where exchange value circulates between industries and households. All else is exogenous" (Gladwin et al., 1995: 884). Fittingly, scholars within the business-as-forever-usual conversation focus their analysis almost exclusively on market transactions occurring between economic agents (Egri and Pinfield, 1996).

Because natural phenomena are difficult to efficiently control through market-based mechanisms alone—or through traditional cost-benefit analyses and accounting practices—aspects of the natural environment are often neglected (Schwartz and Saiia, 2012). Framed differently, the business-as-forever-usual conversation considers the natural environment only to the extent that natural systems produce quantifiable economic value (Crouch, 2006). Whilst the natural environment might serve as an exploitable resource for much needed raw

materials, it not perceived as intrinsically valuable by itself (Barney, 1991). Of those examples where the business-as-forever-usual conversation explicitly considers the natural environment, nature is reified as readily exploitable object. As Springett (2003: 73) argues: "[even] when the environment is brought into economic considerations, the language is borrowed from classical economics: natural resources, natural capital, stocks of assets."

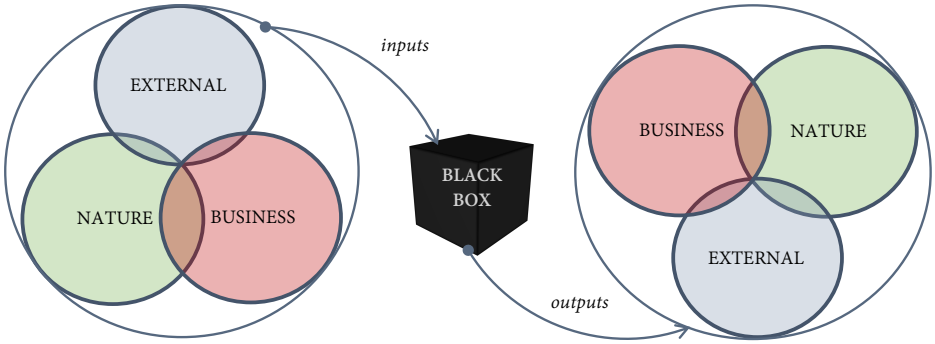
I agree with Marcus et al's (2010: 411) observation that because the business-as-usual conversation "systematically excludes consideration of social and environmental phenomena that cannot be economically quantified [it] fails to make salient many of the critical issues currently facing humanity." Given the business-as-forever-usual conversation's over-simplified understanding of human-nature relations, nature, given its complexity, always loses out.

5.2. Business-as-little-less-than-usual

Two main theoretical perspectives are important with respect to the business-as-little-less-than-usual conversation: (a) *corporate strategy* (Porter and van der Linde, 1995), which includes the natural-resource based view of the firm (Hart, 1995); and (b) *institutional theory* (Hoffman and Ventresca, 1999; Lounsbury et al., 2012). The term 'little less' is borrowed from Tregidga, Milne, and Kearins (2015) to highlight that this conversation is non-radical and lacks an emancipatory edge; it also uses preexisting organizational tools and discourses to understand the relationship between organizations and the natural environment (Nyberg and Wright, 2015; Pulver, 2007). Thus, as indicated in Figure 4., scholars rummage around the 'business-nature black box' and discover how organizational greening may be progressed (e.g., Delmas and Toffel, 2008). As such, in this conversation, emphasis is placed on organizational outcomes and environmental inputs, or vice versa. However, in doing so, ecological *issues* are largely neglected – i.e., the outcome of firm activity for natural systems, including how to rectify this, hardly features within this camp (Whiteman et al., 2013). Instead, most research is focused on the natural environment as something that can be

incorporated into preexisting organizational structures and practices (Wright and Nyberg, 2016).

Figure 4 - Depiction of business-as-little-less-than-usual conversation



Before engaging with the two perspectives in more detail, it is important to clarify that the business-as-little-less-than-usual conversation concerns *managing* the natural environment. Indeed, "win-wins," "eco-efficiency', "the business case," "triple bottom line," and "environmental performance" are all common buzzwords within the business-as-little-less-than-usual conversation (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002; Eden, 1994; Elkington, 1998). In contrast to the business-as-usual conversation, here there is explicit recognition that the natural environment and other stakeholders are materially important, and should therefore be considered in corporate decision making. Additionally, restrictions on corporate freedom stemming from the natural environment—that its, regulatory constraints or in terms of cost for instance—are not considered necessarily as a threat to firm financial performance (Kim, 2008; Utting, 2005).

5.2.1. Corporate strategy

Michael Porter's (1991) essay *America's Green Strategy* was one of the first attempts at exploring the link between economy and ecology. As discussed in Section 4.1 regarding the history of corporate environmentalism, before the 1990s environmental issues were perceived as a regulatory burden. However, the Harvard Business School professor disagreed:

"the conflict between environmental protection and economic competitiveness is a false dichotomy. It stems from a narrow view of the sources of prosperity and a static view of competition" (Porter, 1991: 33). Thereby, Porter argued that, given the right market and regulatory conditions, the environment could be financially lucrative (Porter and van der Linde, 1995). This sparked a large-scale academic endeavor, particularly by finance and strategy scholars, to "find" a link between financial and natural performance (Margolis and Walsh, 2003). However, whilst this debate has persisted for some time now, and despite having amassed a significant body of empirical work, a definitive answer to whether it pays to be green remains elusive (Orlitzky et al., 2003). As Hoffman and Georg (2012: 16) point out: "[…] the question needs to be reformulated. Instead of asking 'if' it pays to be green, attention should refocus on 'how' and 'when' it pays to be green." The natural-resource-based view attempts to address these questions, which has become pervasive within the business-as-little-less-than-usual conversation (Hart and Dowell, 2011).

Hart (1995) conceptualizes this perspective by extending the already dominant resource-based view of the firm, which suggests that a firm's available resources—whether internal or external, tangible or intangible—are associated with certain capabilities (Backman et al., 2015). Thus, the better a firm does at developing their resources into capabilities, and leverage these accordingly, the more competitive they are (Lee and Klassen, 2015). Hart points out a flaw in the resource based view, however, arguing that it: "[…] systematically ignores the constraints imposed by the biophysical (natural) environment" (1995: 986). The natural-resource-based view corrects this by stressing that the constraints posed by the biophysical environment must be managed properly in order to leverage these appropriately, and thereby maintain a sustained competitive advantage. In this respect, industry players without such corporate environmental strategies will be less competitive (Torugsa et al., 2012). Thus, engaging in efficiency measures by, for instance, minimizing waste and investing in pollution prevention mechanisms ceases to be a regulatory burden, and because of cost saving potential, managing the natural environment becomes a competitive advantage. Importantly,

research in this space considers stakeholders as significant, if not crucial, for the development of corporate environmental strategy (Sharma and Henriques, 2005; Chatterji and Toffel, 2010; Delmas and Toffel, 2004). In this respect, stakeholders often pressure firms to develop certain organizational capabilities – Sharma and Vredenburg (1998), for instance, illustrate how firms that integrate stakeholders concerns perform better in terms of, amongst others factors, waste reduction and energy conservation programs.

Whilst this approach has gained significant traction both theoretically and in practice, it has arguably failed with respect to furthering large-scale environmental sustainability (Banerjee, 2012b). As Hart and Dowell (2011: 1466) contend in their review of natural resource-based view research: "It should come as little surprise, therefore, that over the past 15 years, most of the application of the [natural-resource based view] has been focused on pollution prevention, with much less attention to empirical research on product stewardship or sustainable development strategies." As such, scholars have neglected the other side of the sustainability coin: that neither firms, nor societies, become "sustainable" merely due to efficiency increases – there are other factors that mediate between firms, nature and society. Here, institutional theory becomes especially useful since it foregrounds cultural pressures that shape the business-nature relationship (Ansari et al., 2013; Hoffman, 2001a).

5.2.2. Institutional theory

From an institutional theory perspective, organizations engage with the natural environment largely due certain socio-cultural pressures (Bansal and Gao, 2006; Hoffman, 1999; Jennings and Zandbergen, 1995). These pressures can either be formal (e.g., laws) or informal (e.g., norms); "exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organizations function" (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 150). In contrast to the natural-resource based view, from an institutional theory perspective, organizations do not necessarily engage with environmental issues to gain a competitive advantage, but rather to maintain legitimacy (Elsbach, 1994). Being considered legitimate by organizational audiences ensures access to resources, coupled with

securing a social license to operate, both of which are crucial for organizational survival (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1974; Suddaby et al., 2010). In this regard, "organizations addressing multiple and competing demands face a dilemma: satisfying one demand may require violating others [...], thus potentially jeopardizing organizational legitimacy" (Pache and Santos, 2010: 456).

Earlier institutional work made a strong case for how organizations behave according to shifting institutional arrangements, rather than market or technical demands alone. Two studies are important with respect to the natural environment: Jennings and Zandbergen's (1995: 1015) article in the *Academy of Management Review* special issue on "Ecologically Sustainable Organizations" which argued that an institutional perspective: "helps to understand how consensus is built around the meaning of sustainability and how concepts or practices associated with sustainability are developed and diffused among organizations"; and Hoffman's (1999) study of the US chemical industry's adoption of corporate environmentalism. These two papers are underpinned by the notion that as regulatory, normative and/or cognitive pressures regarding the natural environment shift, so too will organizations (see also Lounsbury, 2001). From this foundation, institutional theory has produced a large body of influential work regarding business-natural environment relations (for overview see Jennings and Hoffman, 2017). Studies often compare how institutional pressures that differ between foreign and home countries shape the environmental strategies of multinational companies (Levy and Kolk, 2002). Other studies focus on shifts in either industry standards or specific regulatory demands, including, for instance, how changes in government regulatory pressure have led to the adoption of certain green technologies (Maguire and Hardy, 2009), and environmental programs (Hahn, Figge, et al., 2015; Henriques and Sadorsky, 1996). In this thesis, I draw from two institutional theory concepts: institutional work (Lawrence, Roy Suddaby, et al., 2009a) and organizational fields.

Institutional work refers to purposive actions that aim to create, maintain and disrupt institutions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006: 215). Thereby, this perspective stresses three main

points: "it depicts institutional actors as reflexive, goal-oriented and capable; it focuses on actors' actions as the centre of institutional dynamics; and it strives to capture structure, agency and their interrelations" (Lawrence et al., 2013: 1024). I draw on the concept of institutional work in Article IV to explore how climate activists stigmatize the fossil fuel industry. Similar to how agency is conceptualized in Section 3.2, actors make strategic moves within the contexts they operate to manipulate a discursive order (Lawrence, Roy Suddaby, et al., 2009b; Maguire et al., 2004). Applied to the level of the organization, this politicizes corporate activity and infers that organizations also engage in symbolic action to manipulate other actors (Levy and Scully, 2007).

I draw on the concept of fields in Article I which explores the definitional struggles surrounding sustainable development as an issue field within the context of the UN Earth Summits. Organizational fields are recognized areas of institutional life (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012; Lounsbury et al., 2003; Wooten and Hoffman, 2008). Global environmental governance, as described in Section 4.2, may be considered a macro level issue field (Ansari et al., 2013; Levy and Kolk, 2002). In this respect, issues surrounding the natural environment not only define a field, but provide power arena for socio-political contests over meanings of the global ecological crisis (Livesey, 2002b). This way, organizational life "forms around a central issue – such as the protection of the natural environment – rather than a central technology or market [and] introduces the idea that fields become centers of debates in which competing interests negotiate" (Hoffman, 1999: 351). More generally related to this thesis' overall aim, institutional fields are useful as a means to conceptualize the 'war of position', to borrow Gramsci's terminology, that occurs across multiple levels (Carter et al., 2011; Levy and Spicer, 2013). However, whilst institutional theory accounts for power struggles, power is generally treated as a centralized resource that is held by certain field actors (for exception see Lawrence, 2009). Thus, as Wittneben et al (2012: 1436) stress: "[…] power is inextricably intertwined with institutional change, yet remarkably most institutional theorists either elide the question of power or treat it structurally as an exogenous variable." Accordingly, to

conceptualize power in line a discourse theory understanding of power, I now turn to the business-as-critically-explored conversation. Here scholars not only explicitly consider power as the pervasive force through which the business-nature relationship is constituted, but engage in an emancipatory project.

5.3. Business-as-critically-explored

Scholarship within the business-as-critically-explored conversation problematizes modern conceptions of environmental management such as corporate social responsibility, corporate environmentalism, and corporate citizenship (Banerjee, 2008; Prasad and Mills, 2010). As Starkey and Crane (2003: 220) suggest: "organizations largely operate within a system of assumptions, values, and beliefs that privilege profitability and economic growth and that marginalize ecological concerns." Thus, focusing on how and why greening pays—as both conversations discussed above exemplify—privileges the firm instead of nature; thereby, the firm reproduces its power position as master, and subjugates nature as slave (Escobar, 1996). This perverse relationship is not only unjust, but has adverse effects on natural systems. Indeed, it is difficult to neglect that, despite corporate greening activities as purported by the previous two conversations, ample evidence suggests that these efforts are by far not enough (Carbon Tracker Initiative, 2012). In fact, it might even be that the obsession with finding win-wins and the evasive link between ecology and economy are distracting from the real issues at hand, as Holling (1995: 19) suggest: "theories that do not match the problem can be at best delusions and at worst dangerous."

Management and organization scholars have long been concerned with the misappropriation of nature within mainstream business research. Indeed, there is little disagreement that business-natural environment literature initially lacked concern for environmental issues. Shrivastava (1994: 711) for instance pointed out that our theories of organization are "narrow, economistic, and anti-naturalistic" to the point of being "castrated" from any sort of serious concern for the natural environment. Shrivastava (1994: 707), in an attempt to highlight this conceptual void, asserts: "Given the pervasive environmental impacts of all

organizational elements, it is important for [organization studies] to re-conceptualize organizational knowledge. It needs to rethink basic theoretical ideas in a way that allows discussion of the natural environment." Gladwin et al (1995: 1995) expresses similar concerns, for instance arguing that: "[…] most management theorizing and research continues to proceed as if organizations lack biophysical foundations. Organic and biotic limits in the natural world are excluded from the realm of organizational science." Therefore, whilst research considers social, political and technological influences as part of the business environment, ecological concerns hardly feature.

A normative undertone within these studies is palpable. Scholars, for instance, suggest several alternative paradigms that re-conceptualize the dominant neoclassical economic theory of the firm, including, amongst others, the "ecocentric organization paradigm" (Purser et al., 1995) and "sustaincentricism" (Shrivastava, 1995). Although subtle differences exist amongst these alternative perspectives, they share a systems-based understanding of the organization-nature relationship – i.e., as an interconnected web rather than a deconstructed hierarchy (Valente, 2012). Based on a systems perspective, to avoid a large scale ecological crisis, a paradigmatic transformation is necessary with regard to the relationship between organizations and the natural environment (Crane, 2000: 673). I return to this concept of systems in the next section (5.4).

The question of whether it pays to be green, or how to reconfigure organizations so that it does pay to be green, is somewhat irrelevant for the business-as-critically-explored conversation, because even if it did pay to be green, nature cannot be valued by economic metrics alone (Nyberg and Wright, 2015). Nonetheless, despite several notable calls, by and large, there seems to be a continuing disregard for issues surrounding the natural environment within mainstream organizations and management research (for exception see Gladwin, 2012; Wright and Nyberg, 2014a). In addition, studies addressing the relationship between organizations and the natural environment fail to include issues around race, gender, inequality and so on (Banerjee, 2012b; Springett, 2003).

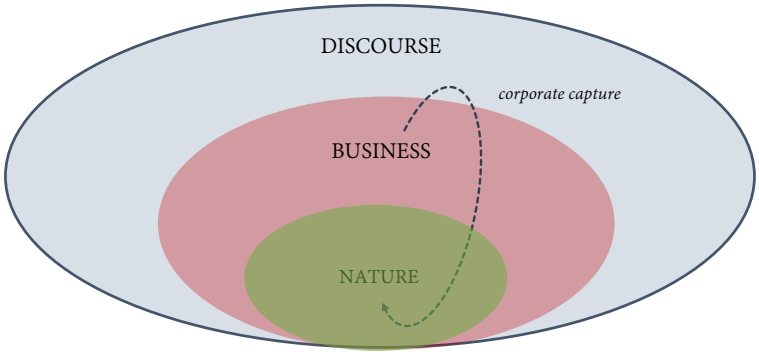
Much of the business-as-critically-explored conversation is rooted within CMS, the philosophical and theoretical assumptions of which were discussed in Section 3.3.2. Applied to the context of organizations and the natural environment, a critical interpretation focuses primarily on how social structure, power, and political interests contribute to declining ecological well-being, including the continued subjugation of marginalized of groups affected by environmental issues (Banerjee, 2003; Levy, 1997; Welford, 1998). That organizations must somehow find ways to balance ecological and environmental concerns is often opposed by critical scholars, insisting this cannot be achieved without making harsh tradeoffs between economy and ecology (Prasad and Elmes, 2005). The business-as-critically-explored conversation problematizes the taken-for-grantedness of assuming that finding win-wins in naturally a 'good' thing, which is, as highlighted above, the core premise of mainstream research on business and the natural environment (see Hahn et al., 2010). In this respect, Banerjee observes: "Much of this research is silent on explaining what happens when 'good' environmental outcomes lead to 'bad' financial or economic outcomes, how managers and firms negotiate these trade-offs, or whether 'environmental outcomes' are sustained over a period of time" (2008: 210). Indeed, recognition of these tradeoffs is glaringly missing from most mainstream policy and business responses to issues regarding the natural environment. For example, as proposed by Wright and Nyberg (2015a: 46):

> *[…] the image of 'green' or 'natural' capitalism proposed through corporate environmentalism and business sustainability promises no conflicts and no trade-offs. Under this re-varnished imaginary, it is possible to continue the current global expansion of consumption and address climate change. No conflict between material affluence and environmental well-being is acknowledged.*

Attempting to marry nature and business without substantially reconsidering the mechanisms and ideology though which capitalism functions merely results in the misappropriation of nature and the ideological reproduction of neoliberal, narrowly defined, capitalist discourses (Macnaghten and Urry, 1998b; Urry, 2011). In enacting these discourses, the business-as-critically-explored conversation highlights how certain

discursive processes result in natural environment being "captured," "hijacked," or "co-opted" (Mayhew, 1997). "Nature" is reframed as an "environmental issue" which must be adequately managed with market-based mechanisms and accounting tools so that these issues can "fit" within a business logic (Crane, 2000; Newton and Harte, 1997). This, in turn, enables businesses "to enjoy economic growth, environmental protection and social improvements with no trade-offs or radical restructurings in the social order" (Laine, 2005: 355). Instead of finding solutions for sustaining the natural environment, corporate environmentalism aims to find environmental solutions to sustain capitalism (Banerjee, 2010; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2008). I have attempted to illustrate how the business-as-critically-explored conversation considers the relationship between business and the natural environment in Figure 5. Here, both business and nature are nested within discourse which determines the relationship between the two. Nature, however, is contained within business: the dotted arrow indicates the 'corporate capture' (O'Dwyer, 2003) of nature into preexisting business practices.

Figure 5 - Depiction of business-as-critically-explored conversation



5.4. Organizing beyond organization

It is without doubt that the above conversations have produced relevant as well as interesting insights for the field of organizations and the natural environment. However, by the very object of their research, management and organization scholars have remained largely confined within the narrowly definitions of organizational life. I do not wish to claim that

organization and management scholars are oblivious to this shortcoming; in fact, many scholars expressly recognize the importance of examining social relations beyond individual organizations and their immediate business environments (e.g., Hahn et al., 2014). In relation to sustainability, Jennings and Zandbergen (1995: 1023) for instance highlight that: "…individual organizations cannot become sustainable: Individual organizations simply contribute to the large system in which sustainability may or may not be achieved." I *do* however consider the obsession with exploring how environmental inputs influence organizational outcomes (depicted in Figure 4 above) as problematic with respect addressing sustainability issues. Here, Gray (2010: 48) offers a sobering polemic:

> *The most immediate is probably that any simple assessment of the relationship between a single organisation and planetary sustainability is virtually impossible. The relationships and interrelationships are simply too complex. Furthermore, to assume that the notion of ''sustainability" has tangible meaning at the level of organisation is to ignore all we know about sustainability. Sustainability is a systems-based concept and, environmentally at least, only begins to make any sense at the level of eco-systems and is probably difficult to really conceptualise at anything below planetary and species levels. So whatever else organisational 'accounts of sustainability' are, they are probably not accounts of sustainability.*

Whilst Gray is referring specifically to social and environmental accounting (see also Tregidga et al., 2014), his insights are significant for each of the three conversations discussed above. At one extreme, the business-as-usual conversation does not consider business at all being intertwined with anything else but firm activity and markets; nature is an exogenous element that only matters if it can be accounted for through traditional market transactions. Whilst the business-as-little-less-than-usual conversation does see an interconnectedness between business and nature, it fails to integrate the two holistically, preferring instead to conceptualize their relationship as mediated by "external business environment" (Lee and Klassen, 2015), or, from an institutional perspective, by the "organizational field" (Hoffman, 2001b; Lounsbury et al., 2003). The business-as-critically-explored conversation comes closest to recognizing the pitfalls of ignoring the complexities that manifest outside the

confines of organizational life. Yet, proposals to move the study of organization and the natural environment further (e.g., Hahn et al., 2015) often reproduce a narrow understanding of the relationship between nature and organization (notable exceptions include Marcus et al., 2010; Tregidga et al., 2015).

Surprisingly, the organization-natural environment nexus was initially conceptualized as systemically interconnected and inherently complex – this is a key insight upon which so much work is based on. As pioneers such as Gladwin et al (1995) asserted, organizations are after all embedded within systems and cannot be approached through firm-centric analyses alone. However, as Whiteman et al (2013: 310) recently emphasized, most research remains "linearly focused on firm and industry effects." Whiteman and her colleagues thus advocate for "more studies that analyse how the micro role of firms and industries interacts with a 'macro-view' of the world 'informed by system dynamics'." Admittedly, there is a growing, albeit peripheral, body of research that does indeed approach the business-natural environment relationship from a more holistic perspective; loosely articulated under the rubric of 'systems thinking' (Egri and Pinfield, 1996; Marcus et al., 2010; Roome and Louche, 2016). The main idea that underpins a systems approach is that organizations are embedded with social-political, economic and ecological systems, the relations among which operate across special and temporal scales (Williams et al., 2017). These studies, whilst methodologically and theoretically disparate, have certain overlapping characteristics that are important for this thesis.

First, by applying a systems approach to the relationship between organizations and the natural environment, sustainability issues become unsolvable, or rather unachievable (Gaziulusoy et al., 2013; Latour, 2013). Sustainability is thus framed not as an end goal, but as a constantly changing dynamic that is always flux. This more fluid approach suggests that natural, social-political and economic systems transform and adapt in accordance with one another. The only situation where sustainability might be achieved is where all politics and tensions cease to define relations amongst systems (Springett, 2003). Indeed, most studies in

the business-as-little-less-than-usual conversation proposes precisely this – that economic growth and natural preservation can co-exist in harmony; a utopia where social, economic and natural systems are in balance (Gladwin, 2012). From a systems perspective, harmony is somewhat irrelevant because systems are defined by complexity, tension, and paradoxes (Hahn et al., 2015; Ven der Byl and Slawinski, 2015).

Second, systems thinking suggests that natural, social-political and economic systems are not only interconnected, but that they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing (Gladwin et al., 1995; Valente, 2012). Each element within a system determines the system as a whole – there is no separating elements. Any attempt to separate elements leads to the inevitable misunderstanding of that system (Cilliers, 1998). For example, the natural environment is embedded with economic systems, notably capitalism (Böhm et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2013), which in turn is defined by socio-political systems. Changes in natural systems therefore have a knock-on effect on economic and social-political systems, and vice versa (Unruh, 2000). Thus, examining how an individual firm impacts its local eco-system, without accounting for this relationship's embeddedness within broader social and economic systems, misrepresents the extent to which that firm may or may not be sustainable.

Third, relations between organizations and the natural environment cannot be approached through a single theoretical lens, methodological approach, or level of analysis, within one period of time (Gao and Bansal, 2013; Starik and Rands, 1995). There must be an integrative approach that explicitly considers scale, or "the spatial, temporal, quantitative, or analytical dimensions used to measure and study any phenomenon" (Cash et al., 2006: 8). As such, it is crucial for business-natural environment research to operate across individual, organizational, and macro scales, but as well as across time periods. Based on this perspective, the relations that define sustainability thus include consideration for political-economic, social-cultural, and ecological environment relationships interaction at all levels of analysis. Starik and Kanashiro (2013: 17) propose:

> *The greater the frequency, breadth, depth, genuineness, competency, and systems-orientation of human involvement in addressing sustainability management phenomena at multiple levels, the greater the possibilities for improvements in both the capacities for and achievements of environmental and socioeconomic long-term quality of life on a significant scale.*

Despite a need to broaden the research agenda, as mentioned, a systems approach remains sidelined (Williams et al., 2017). There are several possible reasons for this such as the misconception that this sort of approach is simply too broad, or the publication process preferring clean-cut, uniform, lean studies with an easy-to-follow narrative. However, engaging with organizations and the natural environment through a systems approach does not mean muddled research (Holling, 2001; Rotmans and Loorbach, 2009) . On the contrary, it invites scholars to be open alternative perspectives and to use multiple tools to understand a complex world, instead of relying on only that which is considered appropriate in whatever silo they find themselves in. In this respect, Bansal and Gao (2006: 473) thus suggest:

> *Researchers have an enormous opportunity to explore how these various levels are nested within each other. […] By exploring these relationships between different levels of analysis, theories, enterprises, and disciplines, we will really start to push new frontiers that are afforded to us by the environmental domain.*

This thesis in some respects adopts a systems approach to the study of organizations and the natural environment, given certain caveats. I do not adopt or apply any sort of rigorous systems theory, method, or framework, both because there are few frameworks that are both empirically grounded and theoretically rich with the notable exception of complex systems theory (Levy and Lichtenstein, 2011), and that the majority of systems based work adopting overly material understanding of natural systems (Whiteman et al., 2013; Rockstrom et al., 2009). Instead, I draw from the general insights that a systems perspective has to offer, and heed Williams et al's (2017) call to explicitly recognize: "social-ecological embeddedness beyond the boundaries of the firm, industry, and product/process level, as well as the interconnections across multi-level, nested social-ecological systems." Furthermore, systems

thinking, especially regarding its emphasis on *interconnectedness*, works well with discourse analysis (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000), which I elaborate on in the next chapter (Chapter 6). This allows my research to move beyond the theoretical and analytical confines of current research on organizations and the natural environment (Hahn et al., 2015; Tregidga et al., 2015).

CHAPTER 6 – METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The methodological approach used in this thesis is based on multi-level, multi-method organizational discourse analysis (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Phillips and Oswick, 2012; Starik and Rands, 1995; Barry et al., 2006; Mumby, 2004). As suggested by Phillips and Oswick (2012: 29), *multi-level* regards "connecting the micro-linguistic and macro-philosophical perspectives," and *multi-method* refers to integrating different discursive methods. Though I have discussed discourse theory from a philosophical perspective in Section 3.2, I now detail how I engaged with form of discourse analysis. In this section I reflect on three points: I first start off by broadly considering why I have 'chosen' discourse analysis as a suitable form of analysis for this study; then, how I conducted discourse analysis from a multi-level, multi-method perspective; and finally, my role as a discourse analyst.

6.1. What is discourse analysis?

Discourse theory, at least as it is conceptualized within this thesis, implies that theory and method are inseparable (van Dijk, 2011; Wodak et al., 1999). Discourse analysis therefore cannot be used solely as an analytical tool; conversely, nor can discourse theory be used purely as an abstract model. As Wood and Kroger (2000: x) argue, discourse analysis:

> *[…] is not only about method; it is also a perspective on the nature of language and its relationship to the central issues of the social sciences. More specifically, we see discourse analysis as a related collection of approaches to discourse, approaches that entail not only practices of data collection and analysis, but also a set of metatheoretical and theoretical assumptions and a body of research claims and studies.*

This does not imply that other forms of qualitative research do not contain elements of discourse, including for instance conversation analysis (Whittle and Mueller, 2011) or narrative analysis (Ganzin et al., 2014), amongst others. As such, interdisciplinary overlap blurs what exactly determines discourse analysis. Many have indeed argued that discourse analysis should be re-labeled "discourse studies" as this would better capture discourse analysis as a scholarly tradition as opposed to a rigorous research method, theory, or

framework (van Dijk, 2011). To paraphrase a common expression that I often overhear in academic quarters: it is not about how to *do* a discourse analysis; rather, it is about *being* interested in discourse (van Dijk, 1993).

Discourse analysis forms part of a wider range of constructivist approaches in social science research, and refers broadly to exploring the patterns, structures and compositions of discourses including their constitutive effects (Mumby, 2004; Phillips and Oswick, 2012). As mentioned in Section 3.2 regarding its philosophical underpinnings, discourse is ontologically anti-essentialist and is not predicated on a single reality that is somehow governed by a set of immutable properties, but several socially constructed regimes that are constantly being (re)constituted by definitional struggles (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). This understanding of discourse analysis has noticeably gained influence, not only in more mainstream organization and management research, but specifically with regard to studies addressing the business-nature relationship (Dryzek, 1997; Hajer, 2005; Livesey, 2002a, 2002c; Livesey and Kearins, 2002; Tregidga et al., 2013). For the field of organization and management studies more generally discourse analysis has proven especially fruitful because, as Philips and Hardy (2002: 14) argue:

> *Discourse analysis offers new opportunities for researchers to explore the empirical ramifications of the linguistic turn that has worked its way through the social sciences and humanities in the last 20 years. Whereas other qualitative methods provide well-developed approaches for understanding the social world and the meaning it has for the people in it, discourse analysis goes one step further […]. It focuses attention on the processes whereby the social world is constructed and maintained.*

In other words, discourse analysis moves the focus on interpreting and describing social reality, as was common with most qualitative methodologies prior to the linguistic turn, to understanding how the social is produced (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000). Discourse analysis also stresses that meaning-making is to a certain extent fluid, and at times decisively precarious; it is therefore not useful, from a discourse analytic perspective, to necessarily capture social reality through research processes (Chia, 2000; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002).

Whatever the researcher claims s/he captured, described or "found," is only temporary – meaning is never fixed given its inevitable re-articulation. The discourse analyst's primary objective is to analyze how this temporary fix is constituted by language, or, in other words, how objects and subjects are talked into being (Knights and Morgan, 1991; Leitch and Palmer, 2010; Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

There are of course many types of discourse analysis, and with this, many typologies that seek to provide some clarity by categorizing the heterogeneity (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002; Phillips and Hardy, 2011a). Indeed, the type of analysis applied to the study of discourse is largely dependent on the philosophical assumptions of the researcher. In this respect, a broad distinction can be made based on the extent to which discourse is fully constitutive of the social, or whether the social is constituted by discourse and other non-discursive social mechanisms (Barry et al., 2006). Regarding the later, analytical approaches are at one extreme more concerned with language use in everyday text and talk, which is common approach in discursive psychology (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Here the analyst is interested, often within a localized context, to understand how individuals creatively use language during social interaction with other individuals. This thesis is least concerned with this type of analysis which operates within a contained, almost laboratory-like, context.

Instead, my multi-level, multi-method approach focuses on the intersecting micro-, meso-, and macro-level discourses. Here, Alvesson and Karreman's (2000: 1133) distinction between "macro-systemic and local-situated" is useful to clarify the scope and scale of discourse in relation to its context:

> *One option is to take an interest in discourse at close range, considering and emphasizing local, situational context. Language use is here understood in relationship to the specific process and social context in which discourse is produced. At the other extreme we see discourse as a rather universal, if historically situated, set of vocabularies, standing loosely coupled to, referring to or constituting a particular phenomenon.*

As discussed in Section 4.2, this thesis is broadly situated within the context of global environmental governance (Levy and Newell, 2005). Accordingly, given that this context operates across multiple temporal and spatial dimension, and is not necessarily fixed to a specific physical space (Okereke et al., 2009), my approach to discourse analysis leans more toward a macro-systemic approach. However, I do not consider the macro-level in isolation of its foundations, given that, as Broadfoot et al (2004: 194) suggest: "[…] macro-level discourses-as-structures can be seen as existing only to the extent that they are endlessly reproduced in the language and knowledge resources deployed by individuals engaged in organizing processes." This study's context is similarly implicated by an array of discursive practices that are linked to the production, distribution and consumption of texts by specific actors.

By text I do not only mean written transcripts, but, more broadly "any kind of symbolic expression requiring a physical medium and permitting of permanent storage" (Hardy and Phillips, 2004: 300). Texts therefore are considered to be a discursive 'unit'—an utterance of sorts—that represents the material manifestation of discourse (Chalaby, 1996). Moreover, text can be used as a 'weapon' in these sense that the distribution of discourses shapes the context within which it is consumed. In this vein, as Kress (1995: 122) suggests:

> *Texts are the sites of the emergence of complexes of social meanings, produced in the particular history of the situation of production, that record in partial ways the histories of both the participants in the production of the text and of the institutions that are "invoked" or brought into play, indeed a partial history of the language and the social system, a partiality due to the structurings of relations of power of the participants.*

I therefore consider the global environmental governance context as constituted by the total collection of texts have been produced about global environmental governance. However, it would be impractical to focus on *all* texts. Instead, I analyzed "texts that leave traces" (Phillips et al., 2004: 640), or, in other words, those texts that are important because they are widely circulated (Taylor and Van Every, 2000). As illustrated in Appendix I, the main data sources

are CEO speeches, corporate reports, newspaper articles, and other publically available documents produced by relevant organizations (e.g., NGOs or UN affiliated institutions). Although there are significant overlaps (e.g., between Articles II and III), the emphasis on different texts varies across the four articles. In doing so, each article comes to represent a particular type of 'talk' depending on the focus of the study, and level of analysis.

Importantly, global environmental governance, despite occurring at a transnational level (Levy and Newell, 2005), remains context sensitive given its embeddedness within localized settings such as the UN Earth Summits (Article I), on an organizational level (Articles II and III), and on a micro-level (Article IV). This underscores the usefulness of adopting a multi-level, multi-method approach. I am able to 'move' across levels – a process that Alvesson and Karreman (2000: 1139) refer to as "climbing the ladder of discourse […] from 'discourse' to 'Discourse' and back again." Whereas I start my analysis on a micro-level (discourse with a small 'd'), which involves a detailed textual reading, I end the analysis by reflecting on the macro-level (discourse with a capitalized 'D'), where I consider broader ideological categorizations and their constitutive powers (Fairclough, 1993: 138).

6.2. Why discourse analysis?

Whilst this study adopts discourse analytical method for research motivated reasons, it is worth mentioning that I never made a discerned 'choice' to adopt discourse analysis as my preferred method. Rather, discursive techniques, discourse as philosophy, and the expansive literature that addresses discourse studies, fell into my lap so to speak. I became personally interested with discourse, in part due to its murkiness, peripheral status in management and organization studies (Phillips and Oswick, 2012), and the near-impossibility of truly grasping discourse as method and theory. In short, I found it not only an appropriate manner by which to address my research questions but also intellectually stimulating (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Below I detail three reasons for using a discourse analytical method.

First, discourse analysis challenges the taken-for-grantedness of research regarding organizations and the natural environment by stressing that all knowledge is constituted by language (Phillips and Hardy, 2011b). This suggests that our understanding of business-nature relations must be seriously reexamined, given that modernist assertions about a researcher's objectivity and neutrality, upon which so much research regarding the natural environment is based, does not hold true. For this reason, discourse analysis, in contrast to other social science methods, is highly interpretative (Putnam, 1983). It is through interpreting language use that discourse analysis seeks to understand the meanings that constitute social reality, and how this reality has come to be taken for granted (Leitch and Palmer, 2010; Phillips and Hardy, 2002). This differs substantially from using large data sets and counting the variables that cause certain a particular phenomenon (e.g., Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). Thereby, the human-nature relationship is not defined by properties inherent to either human or nature, but this relationship is meaningful to the extent that language mediates between the two (Dryzek, 1997; Escobar et al., 1999; Hajer, 2005).

Secondly, discourse analysis is appealing because is embraces complexity and politics – all of which resonate the often-messy relationship between human- and natural-systems engagement (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005). This is particularly useful when exploring instances when social actors, for instance, corporations and policy actors, represent concepts such as sustainable development and climate change (Boehmer-Christiansen, 2002). In this respect, Sharp and Richardson (2001: 194) argue that:

> *It is now widely accepted that concepts like sustainability are not simply imposed in a top-down way, say from central government to local government, and then implemented unproblematically. Instead, these concepts are contested, with struggles taking place over their meaning, interpretation and implementation.*

Therefore, by using discourse analysis, I was able to trace how exactly these struggles regarding environmental issues unfold over time (Hajer and Fischer, 1999; Vaara and Monin, 2010). Importantly, this entails highlighting the expressly political role of language in this

ensuing struggle over meaning. After all, there is a significant difference in terms of natural systems being represented as: "the spaceship-ness of the Earth, the greenhouse-ness of climate change, or the disease-ness of pollution" (Myerson and Rydin, 1996: 25). Indeed, depending on its discursive construction, coupled with how this shapes the meaning of what nature means, corporate responses to the global ecological crisis may differ substantially from that of policy makers and civil society actors (Levy and Egan, 2003). Herein lays the usefulness of discourse analysis – it foregrounds culturally embedded language practices that explain how diverging discourses of the ecological crisis are 'talked into being' (Heritage, 1984).

Thirdly, discourse analysis illuminates how social relations, which includes the relationship between humans and nature, are entwined (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000; Livesey, 2002b). I use discourse analysis in this way to 'map out' how meaning is structured and the political contests that challenge this structure. In this sense, language is often referred to as a system in the sense that it provides some continuity, or glue, that holds together to social reality, albeit only temporarily. This structure is necessary because without it there would be no rules, routines and norms that infer what is acceptable, or not. Subjects would fail to identify with anything but the Other, which is a frightening prospect (Howarth, 2009, p 310). Discourse analysis is useful in this regard because objects such as "nature" are given meaning by articulating them as such; as Hajer and Versteeg (2005: 177) describe, "[nature] has to be rendered linguistically intelligible." The result of this practice—a discursive field (see Section 3.2.5)—can be deconstructed and analyzed. This includes exposing those actors, and subject positions, that are granted the "right to speak" within a discursive field (Maguire et al., 2004; Phillips, Lawrence, and Hardy, 2004). This approach to discourse analysis recognizes that this structure—Jørgensen and Phillips (2002: 11) use the metaphor of a fishing-net—is constantly stretched, torn, and re-stitched, which, as theorized by Laclau and Mouffe (2001) is due to social antagonism (Willmott, 2005). To analyze discourse, therefore, is to analyze

the specific moments when antagonism occurs as different meaning structures collide (Torfing, 2005).

6.3. My role as discourse analyst

In my role as discourse analyst, I do not have some all-encompassing, straightforward objective such as proving that X is related to Y; rather I have several multifaceted roles that differ depending on the research problem, theoretical lens, and context (e.g., Maguire and Hardy, 2009). When 'doing' a discourse analysis, as evidenced within each article presented in this thesis, I focus on two primary tasks: (1) to identify how a particular object or subject is represented through language use (Lawrence, Phillips, and Hardy, 1999); and (2) to illustrate the discursive effects of being represented in this particular way (Knights and Morgan, 1991; Purvis and Hunt, 1993). This is of course an oversimplification; different discourse approaches place greater weighting on either task, as do different research problems. Accordingly, regarding my thesis, articles that are more critically inclined (Articles I, II, and III) emphasize the consequences of enacting discursive practices more compared to work that might draw less from critical organizational theory (Article IV).

Whereas the first task usually involves a more fine-grained and "open" approach to analyzing data to identify representations, the latter—i.e., the effects of social representation—is somewhat more challenging because as the analyst, I am embedded within the discourses that I analyze, and by implication, also experience discursive effects (Alvesson et al., 2008). My own interpretation of the data used in this work is similarly constituted by the very discourses I analyze, and thereby reproduce. In line with Barthes' (1975) understanding of subjectivity, I am both master and slave of language (Fairclough, 2003). Developing the ability to identify what is taken-for-granted, coupled with the assumptions upon which this taken-for-grantedness is based, is crucial to critically interpret the production of "truth" (Hardy and Clegg, 1997). Without distinguishing that something is "common-sense" because it is constituted as such, and thus meaningless in and of itself, the researcher considers only what is immediately presented, and thereby through their analysis reproduces meaning that is

already institutionalized. In this sense, constantly being reflexive is particularly important. As Alvesson and Skölberg (2000: vii) note, to be reflexive is "turning a self-critical eye onto one's own authority as an interpreter or author." I did so by 'stepping back', and taking time to write and reflect on my own epistemological and ontological assumptions (addressed in Chapter 3), my positionality as analyst (England, 1994; Rose, 1997), and in terms of my own privileged social position (Alvesson et al., 2008). Furthermore, as is evidenced through my multi-level, multi-method approach to global environmental governance, I have sought *explicitly* to envelop several actor voices to ensure as best possible a "dynamic multiplicity of voices, genres and social languages" (Maybin, 2001: 67).

Relatedly, as this thesis is concerned with discourse as constitutive of reality, I do not endeavor to somehow expose a truth that was hidden through cunning use of rhetorical strategies, as Phillips and Hardy (2011c: 14) put it, "[…] for the discourse analyst, the purpose of research is not to get 'behind' the discourse." All analysis begins with the basic assumption that the text in front of me is a *representation* of reality. Therefore, I also recognize that the conclusions of my thesis are indeed *my* interpretation of the data; hence, whilst I aimed to ensure a high level of analytic rigor and clarity in terms of my research process, I do not claim that my understanding of the data is in any way 'truth'. My research activity, and the claims I make, represent a certain reality of the social world, which is consumed and enacted very much like other discourses (Hardy and Clegg, 1997). I am therefore cognizant that academic research outputs, as well as the research process, are performative; as Phillips and Hardy (2011c: 9) caution: "researchers are continuously challenged to retain a sensitivity to our role in the constitution of categories and frames that produce a reality of a particular sort." I take heed here and am open to other interpretations of what I have produced.

CHAPTER 7 – THE ARTICLES

As mentioned previously, each article included in this thesis whilst collectively underpinned by a central aim, engages with how the relationship between organizations and the natural environment is constituted through discursive struggles surrounding the global ecological crisis. Below I provide a narrative that illustrates the evolution of the four articles, including how they are interconnected (see Figure 6 and Table 1 below for overview) At this point it is probably worth mentioning that although I present this seemingly well-formulated narrative in a mechanistic step-by-step manner, a more accurate portrayal would be one in spirit of Law's (2004: 10) assertion that social science research: "will often be slow and uncertain. A risky and troubling process, it will take time and effort to make realities and hold them steady for a moment against a background of flux and indeterminacy." Thus, I do not wish to give the impression that the thesis was a well-rehearsed, methodically planned exercise, but that it reflected a personal and philosophical journey that was underpinned by intellectual curiosity about organizational life, and concern about social and environmental justice.

7.1. Article overview and summary

Article I - Struggles at the summits: Discourse coalitions, field boundaries, and the shifting role of business in sustainable development

The first article emerged from my research proposal. The main idea was to explore how a dominant understanding of business' role in sustainable development was constructed over time. To capture a broad perspective that could encompass multiple actors' voices, I opted to examined how business was represented at large transnational fora, in my case the UN Earth Summits, a salient arena in which discursive struggles take place regarding the ecological crisis. The article concerns fields, or those power arenas that operate in-between macro discourses (e.g., capitalism) and organizations where actors with varying interests and resource endowments vie for definitional control over issues such as sustainable development (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). The objective of this article was to identify the field-level dynamics that constitute business' role in sustainable development as multiple

actors compete for definitional control and power positions. It illustrated how an ensuing struggle between 'transformative', 'centrist', and 'business-as-usual' discourses shifted the role of business in sustainable development from being largely *undefined* in 1992 to considered a sustainable development *partner* in 2002 and finally a *driver* of sustainable development in 2012. These shifts were facilitated by two dynamics identified in the article: the rearranging of transnational sustainable development field boundaries during the Johannesburg Summit in 2002; and the forming of a discourse coalition which occurred ten years later during the Rio+20 Summit.

By attempting to expand the field of discursivity beyond the confines of the firm to include the voices of multiple actors, in this study I sought to address the overly-organization centric focus of literature about organizations and the natural environment (See Section 5.4). In this respect, the findings of the article demonstrated how disparate actors engage in a complex discursive dance as they vie to secure definitional control of business' role in sustainable development. The findings also demonstrated how this process had the ideological effect of concealing some of the contradictions that underpin business-sustainable development relations, and acting as a legitimizing tool for those actors in power. Relatedly, it became apparent that resource-intensive companies were very much involved in terms of defining what sustainable development means for business, and what business means for sustainable development. I was actually rather astonished to find that precisely those companies and individuals most visibly involved at the Earth Summits were related to resource-intensive companies – e.g., Chad Holliday (CEO of chemicals company, Du Pont), Stephan Schmidheiny (Chairman of cement business, Eternit Group), and Philip Watts (Chairman, oil and gas company, Royal Dutch Shell) This, in turn, prompted me to consider how fossil fuel companies were engaging the construction of the global sustainability crisis, which prompted the second article.

Article II - Drilling your own grave: How the European oil and gas supermajors avoid sustainability tensions through organizational mythmaking

The second article explores how, in the context of European oil and gas supermajors, tensions between economic growth and environmental protection are avoided through organizational mythmaking as a discursive practice. In this article, which operated on the organizational level, I attempted to problematize literature regarding a "paradox approach" or "integrative view" on corporate sustainability (for overview see Van der Byl and Slawinski, 2015). Here, scholars argue that instead of ignoring tensions between economic, social, and environmental dimensions, firms should instead accept and embrace these often contradictory demands simultaneously (Berger et al., 2007; Gao and Bansal, 2013; Hahn et al., 2014; Hahn et al., 2015). This research approach is typical for the business-as-little-less-than-usual conversation – scholars look inside the business-nature black box to find ways to operationalize sustainability within organizations, stressing that sustainability tensions, if properly harnessed "can be powerful to enable peak performance" (Smith and Lewis, 2011: 395). In line with problematizing research as proposed by Alvesson and Sandberg (2011), this article turns the notion of a paradox approach to sustainability on its head. In doing so, Article II shows instead how certain discursive practices—I used the concept of mythmaking here (Boje et al., 1982; Brown, 1994; Wright and Nyberg, 2014b)—construct the business-nature relationship in ways that obfuscate sustainability tensions. In this article, discursive practices are conceptualized as a defensive mechanism – three were identified: (i) *regression*, or retreating to the comforts of past familiarities, (ii) *fantasy*, or escaping the harsh reality that fossil fuels and climate change are indeed irreconcilable, and (iii) *projecting*, or blaming external actors for failing to address climate change. The findings show that by enacting these defensive mechanisms, the European oil and gas supermajors reproduce certain ideological discourses; thereby self-determining their inability to substantively address the complexities of climate change.

This suggested that, in contrast to Article I, discursive practices constituting the relationship between organizations and the natural environment may be constraining for organizations enacting those practices. This raises serious concerns both regarding businesses and nature – if companies continue enacting these discursive practices about their relationship with natural environment, they will inevitably 'drill their own graves', hence the title of the article. Accordingly, I began considering organizations' often destructive relationship with the natural environment as inflicted by a potentially inescapable discursive deadlock. The more they seemed to talk about climate change—whether authentic or not—the less likely they seemed to be able to consider alternatives. This raised the question of how this impasse manifested over time, which led to a longitudinal study of one of the European supermajors, BP.

Article III - Rearticulating a collapsed hegemony: BP, climate governance, and the fantasy lock-in

The third article examined the processes by which an BP attempts to rebuild a discursive structure that collapsed, in this case due to the advent of a global scientific and political consensus regarding anthropogenic climate change. This article is nestled within the business-as-critically-explored conversation, and sought to explore the puzzle of corporate inaction on climate change; drawing extensively from to the concept of hegemony, which has become increasingly prevalent regarding research on the business-natural environment interface (Böhm, Misoczky, and Moog, 2012; Wright and Nyberg, 2014). This article is based largely on Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) emphasis on the *processes* whereby a hegemonic discourse is first arranged based on a 'logic of difference', before being articulated based on a 'logic of equivalence'. In doing so, I show how BP rebuilt an identity around the term 'climate governance', which, in turn, became an empty signifier; quilting together the heterogeneous and even contradictory set of contiguous elements with BP's identity. The main argument here is that enacting 'climate governance' results in a 'fantasy lock-in', which satisfies BP's desire for control over nature, whilst repressing that – in fulfilling its desire for

omnipotence – BP may be causing its own demise. As such, the discursive practices that produced this 'fantasy lock-in' provide one 'answer' to the second article's point of departure.

However, I could not help but feel that something was missing from my work: the counter-hegemonic discourses. Despite all three articles including counter-hegemonic discourses, especially of civil society organizations and environmental NGOs, resistant voices featured as background noise. I felt this was problematic because without that which a discourse excludes as 'other', there would be less of a discursive *struggle* (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). As such, it seemed more than appropriate from a theoretical perspective to consider counter-hegemonic discourses. Indeed, there was also a strong personal motivation give a voice to the environmentalist movement, which, despite their own shortcomings as addressed in Article I, are largely responsible for whatever progress *has* been made with respect to planetary conservation.

Article IV – Stigma work in action: The case of the global fossil fuel divestment movement

The fourth and final article begins with the idea that fossil fuel companies are 'suffering' from negative social evaluation. Here, the negative social evaluation is stigma; the study thus asks from where the fossil fuel industry gains its "classical role as the villains of climate change" (Lovell, 2010: xii). To address this question, the article focuses specifically on climate activists and is based within the context of the fossil fuel divestment movement. This article attributes a significant agency to the efforts of climate activists, compared to the previous three articles. It identifies two discursive practices they engage in aimed at stigmatizing the fossil fuel industry. The first concerns 'meaning work' which refers to the social-symbolic processes that activists enact to construct stigma in form. The second type of work—'diffusion work'—encompasses direct and indirect transmitting processes by which climate activists diffuse stigma amongst influential actors. By proposing a process model of stigmatization, this article emphasizes the micro-level practices of stigmatization that lead to stigma reaching a critical mass.

Overall, each article accounts for a certain voice within the context of global environmental governance: Article I represents 'macro-talk'; Articles II and III represent 'corporate talk'; and Article IV represents 'resistance talk'. These voices also intersect and thus both directly and indirectly constitute each other. The main finding intersecting the articles is that, based on the discursive processes and political contestation detailed in each article, global environmental governance has "talked" itself into a discursive deadlock; here, multiple symbolic systems (different types of talk) are enmeshed into the same discursive order, despite not having resolved their antagonistic relationship. I reflect further on this argument in the concluding chapter of this thesis (Chapter 8).

Table 1 – Overview of the articles

	Article I **Business at the UN Earth Summits**	*Article II* **Paradox and mythmaking**	*Article III* **Hegemony, BP, and fantasy**	*Article IV* **Stigma and fossil fuel divestment**
Authors	George Ferns and Kenneth Amaeshi	George Ferns and Kenneth Amaeshi	George Ferns	George Ferns and Maik Günther
Journal	Business & Society (forthcoming)	Organization Studies (to be submitted August 2017)	Organization (to be submitted December 2017)	AMJ (to be submitted December 2017)
Conference	Paper workshop, Edinburgh Business School, 2014	Paper workshop, Edinburgh Business School, 2016 Paradox workshop, Cass Business School, 2016 (London) EGOS 2016 (Naples) AOM 2016 (Anaheim)	Paper workshop, Edinburgh Business School, 2017 CSR workshop, Cass Business School, 2017 (London) EGOS 2017 (Copenhagen)	Paper workshop, Edinburgh Business School, 2016 WK-ORG conference 2017, (Hamburg) – Best emerging scholar paper award AOM 2017 (Atlanta) – Finalist Best Paper Award for OMT Division
Purpose	Explore how a dominant	Examine how tensions between	Explore the processes by	Explore the institutional work

	understanding of business' role in sustainable development was constructed over time	economic growth and environmental protection are avoided through organizational mythmaking	which an organization attempts to rebuild a discursive structure that collapsed	processes through which organizations become stigmatized
Context	Field level; UN Earth Summits	Organization level; corporate responses to climate change	Organization level; corporate responses to climate change	Meso-micro level; fossil fuel divestment movement
Method	Critical organizational discourse analysis	Critical organizational discourse analysis	Laclauian discourse analysis (Glynos and Howarth, 2007)	Organizational discourse analysis
Data	Official outcome document of each Summit; key texts of actors; and news media	CEO's public speeches, press statements, letters to stakeholders, and media contributions.	BP's CEO speeches; newspaper articles; recognized industry experts accounts; and Greenpeace report	Climate activists text; newspapers; informal interviews
Theory	Field theory (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012)	Mythmaking (Filby and Willmott, 1988; Wright and Nyberg, 2014)	Discourse theory (Laclau and Mouffe, 1991)	Stigmatization (Devers et al., 2009); Institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2006)
Key contribution	Include voices of divergent SD actors that, vis-à-vis business actors, shape business-SD relations over time	Illustrating how sustainability tensions are avoided through certain defensive mechanisms	Detailing practices that rearticulate a hegemonic discourse and foster corporate inaction on climate change	Dynamic process model of stigma work that details the micro-level practices of stigmatization

Figure 6 – Flow of articles

7.2. Article I

Struggles at the summits: Discourse coalitions, field boundaries, and the shifting role of business in sustainable development

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This research explores the field dynamics that facilitated the emergence of a dominant understanding of business' role in sustainable development (SD). Based on a study of the UN Earth Summits, we examine how actors meet every decade to battle for definitional control of what SD means for business, and what business means for SD. Through a discourse analysis of texts from business, policy, and civil society actors during each Summit, we illustrate how an ensuing discursive struggle shifts the role of business in SD from being largely undefined 1992, to being considered a SD partner in 2002, and finally to becoming a driver of SD by 2012. We contend that these shifts occurred largely due to two field dynamics: (1) rearranging of field boundaries; and (2) forming of a discourse coalition. Accordingly, our study highlights how disparate actors coalesce around a shared meaning system and collectively shape the role of business role in SD. However, we argue that despite the allure of a unified meaning-making process between once antagonistic actors, business-SD relations are underpinned by politicized interaction where certain actors come to dominate, and, in doing so, marginalize others.

Since its inauguration on the international political stage during the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Sustainable Development (SD) has been widely acknowledged by governments, civil society, and businesses as a worthy endeavor (Sachs, 2015). Despite its acceptance, few concepts seem to spark as much dispute as SD. There is particular debate around SD's basic assumptions: as Lélé (1991: 1615) asks, if SD is to be pursued then what is to be sustained (nature or the economy) and for whom? Among the many interpretations of these questions, from the perspective of mainstream policy and business, SD seems to be embedded within a 'weak' sustainability discourse (Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005). This largely technocentric discourse tends to prioritize the economy over the natural environment at the expense of a 'strong' sustainability discourse that emphasizes systems thinking and non-discrimination between humans and nature (Gladwin, Kennelly, & Krause, 1995; Starkey & Crane, 2003).

This interpretation of SD is not accidental. A growing literature specifically examines how business constitutes its own understanding of SD, thereby perpetuating a weak sustainability discourse (Livesey, 2002c; Livesey and Kearins, 2002; Milne et al., 2009; Tregidga et al., 2014, 2015). However, as this literature often focuses on corporate disclosures alone, it tends to overlook other key sites of contestation through which meaning is constituted relationally; that is, amongst multiple, often conflicting, actors that both struggle and cooperate with one another to fix meaning. In order to address this gap, we draw from the concept of strategic action fields, or socially constructed arenas within which actors with varying interests and resource endowments vie for a dominant power position (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). We focus in particular on how certain field dynamics—i.e., changes in the field's key organizing principle; actors jockeying for a dominant position vis-à-vis other actors; and the "contentious periods" that break down established field logics (Fligstein and McAdam, 2011; Maguire and Hardy, 2009)—facilitate a discursive struggle surrounding business-SD relations.

A particularly salient arena in which such struggles take place regarding SD are large transnational fora, often hosted by the UN. Though instrumental in the construction of SD (Dodds et al., 2014), these mega-conferences have received scant explicit attention in the business-SD literature (Springett, 2013). Our focus is on the 1992, 2002, and 2012 UN Earth Summits[6], which have been hailed by some for being a catalyst of SD's mainstreaming (Grubb et al., 1994), though lambasted by others for furthering a neoliberal ideology (Banerjee, 2012a). As commentators often express when attending an Earth Summit, tension and contestation is palpable because something is at stake: the regulation of transnational corporations (Chatterjee and Finger, 2014). This alludes to the battlefield-like atmosphere of the Earth Summits as disparate players both compete and cooperate to seize definitional control of business' role as a SD actor.

We are specifically interested in the discursive constitution of business' role in SD, and the effects thereof; that is, how, though the production, dissemination and consumption of text, certain business-SD discourses succeed as dominant, whilst others falter and become subjugated (Phillips et al., 2004). As such, we situate our study within the critical organizational discourse studies tradition (Hardy and Phillips, 1999; Mumby, 2004, 2013) and analyze official outcome documents of each Summit, coupled with certain exemplar texts from business, civil society organizations, and policy actors. This was further supplemented by an analysis of UK and US news articles about the Earth Summits that specifically addressed the role of business in SD. Our analysis illustrates how an ensuing struggle between 'transformative', 'centrist', and 'business-as-usual' discourses shifted the role of business in SD from being largely *undefined* in 1992 to considered a SD *partner* in 2002 and finally a *driver* of SD in 2012. We demonstrate how these shifts were facilitated by two dynamics: the rearranging of transnational SD field boundaries during the Johannesburg Summit in 2002;

[6] We use Earth Summit with the appropriate (e.g., 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit) date/location as an abbreviated byname of each Summit's official title. Official names for the Summits are: UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992); World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002); and United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio de Janeiro, 2012).

and the forming of a discourse coalition which occurred ten years later during the Rio+20 Summit. Furthermore, we illustrate how business attained its impressive influence over the SD agenda based on the support of certain policy and civil society actors, many of whom previously opposed business' involvement in the transnational SD field. This of course has certain implications, which we discuss, including how future research can address the increasingly precarious state of "SD in flux."

This study contributes to ongoing discussions regarding the construction of business-SD relations by expanding the field of discursivity beyond the confines of the firm to include the voices of multiple actors. Thereby, we emphasize how disparate actors engage in a complex discursive dance as they vie to secure definitional control of business' role in SD. In doing so, we attempt to answer Tregidga et al's (2015: 6) call for researchers to "move away from understanding what [SD] means to business, to understanding how those understandings came to be, why they are not inevitable, and how they could be different."

7.2.1. Theoretical framing

Strong vs. weak sustainability, and the middle-ground perspective

Sustainability discourses are often distinguished on a weak vs. strong continuum. On the one hand, discourses indicative of 'weak' sustainability advocate for change to happen within a pro-growth, market-based paradigm and, hence, for SD to become part of the current economic system (Hopwood et al., 2005). The natural environment is thus forced to adapt to culture of progress and growth (Banerjee, 2003; Meadowcroft, 2000; Redclift, 2005). Therefore, SD is interpreted as a means to an end in which the end is economic growth and the means are technocentric – i.e., a strong reliance on technological innovation and human ingenuity (Eden, 1994). On the other hand, 'strong' sustainability discourses draw largely from ecocentric tenets and argue that humans form part of an interconnected, fragile system (Hart, 1995; Purser et al., 1995; Shrivastava, 1995; Starkey and Crane, 2003). Anthropogenic attempts to control the environment through science and technology are therefore futile, or even dangerous (Dryzek, 1997; Milne et al., 2009). Importantly, strong sustainability

discourses are considered more radical and are tied to deep-ecology theory which does not necessarily discriminate between the rights of humans and nature (Colby, 1991). Strong sustainability discourses thus regard issues such as climate change as systemic; to be dealt with through a systems change as opposed to incremental change (Purser et al., 1995).

That business generally subscribes to a weak sustainability discourse is exemplified when critically examining corporate disclosures about SD (Tregidga et al., 2014). Business, somewhat expectedly, interprets its role in SD through confines of a managerial/business logic where SD is understood as an commercial opportunity (Hart, 1997; Laine, 2005; Rutherford, 2003; Springett, 2003; Tregidga et al., 2013). As such, business actors themselves shape their role in SD based on a narrow and economistic understanding of nature that perpetuates a "business-as-little-less-than-usual" mantra (Tregidga et al., 2015: 4). Notions of 'eco-managerialism' and 'eco-efficiency' become etched into the mainstay vocabulary that mediates business and the natural environment (Welford, 2013). Corporate disclosures thus frequently construct SD as something that business embraces, despite in some cases—for example in the fossil fuel industry—SD running counter to business' core purpose (Livesey, 2002c).

SD, particularly when operationalized by business, does not *necessarily* present itself either as indicative of a weak or strong sustainability discourse, but instead often appears as if occupying a middle-ground position between these idealistic extreme poles (Hajer and Fischer, 1999; Hoffman and Ehrenfeld, 1998; Olsen et al., 1992). In such cases, environmental management and economic growth are imagined as a positive-sum game that works both for business and nature (also see Egri and Pinfield, 1996). However, as Milne (2009: 1241) demonstrate in an empirical study of the New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development, middle-ground approaches can in fact "reinforce rather than challenge the status quo [as] business dominance, economic logic and management are perpetuated while presented as alternative and 'middle-way.'" In this vein, scholars often draw from critical theory (Livesey, 2002; Springett, 2003; Tregidga et al., 2015) to expose how SD becomes

"captured" (O'Dwyer, 2003) or "hijacked" (Bruno and Karliner, 2002; Welford, 2013), which enables businesses "to enjoy economic growth, environmental protection and social improvements with no trade-offs or radical restructurings in the social order" (Laine, 2005: 355).

By foregrounding corporate text and talk, the current literature provides an important account of how business shapes its own role in SD by reinforcing a weak sustainability discourse. But business-SD relations are not constitutive of business interpretations, or indeed corporate disclosures, alone. Instead, the process of constructing business-SD relations involves the collective effort of multiple actors, including certain 'non-business' actors such as policy makers and NGOs (Pinkse and Kolk, 2012). As such, meaning-making happens relationally, involving antagonism and consensus, competition and cooperation (Dryzek, 1997). As Hajer and Versteeg (2005: 176) argue: "concepts, such as sustainable development […], are not and cannot simply be imposed in a top-down way, but are continuously contested in a struggle about their meaning, interpretation and implementation." In order to address the politicized construction of the role of business in SD, we draw from Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) understanding of strategic action fields, and focus specifically on the constitutive role of discourse.

Fields as discursively constituted

Strategic action fields are conceptualized "as socially constructed arenas within which actors with varying resource endowments vie for advantage" (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012: 10). Along with particular industries, markets, and professions as common examples of fields, certain issues—in this case SD—can also define a field, thereby resembling a center "of debate in which competing interests negotiate over issue interpretation" (Hoffman, 1999: 351). We focus specifically on the transnational SD field given that SD issues, such as climate change, transcend national boundaries and lack an overarching authority that formally regulates field members (Scherer, et al., 2013). Our approach foregrounds the role of discourse, by which we mean "a system of texts that bring an object into being" (Hardy and

Phillips, 1999: 2) – the object, in our case, concerns *the role of business in SD*. We conceptualize the transnational SD field as a contested discursive space in which actors struggle to secure a particular definition of what SD means for business, and what business means for SD (Hajer, 1995). In this vein, discourses do not merely reflect field interaction, but play a fundamental role in the active structuration of fields by constituting shared meanings and taken-for-granted rules that determine field life (Hardy and Maguire, 2010: 1367). What is considered legitimate or acceptable, and what is not, is largely a matter of ongoing field-level discursive struggles seeking to privilege, or temporarily fix, meaning. In this vein, field structuration is the result of ongoing discursive battles fought with text as weaponry, which include, amongst others, written reports, speeches, manifestoes, and presentations (Hardy and Phillips, 2004: 300). Through the production, dissemination and consumption of these texts, certain SD discourses succeed as dominant, whilst others falter and remain subjugated (Phillips and Hardy, 1997).

This perspective is useful for exploring the transnational SD field for three interrelated reasons. First, the discursive constitution of fields reveals how disparate actors within the transnational SD field—i.e., business, policy and civil society—negotiate shared meaning and form a consensus, despite being in contention with one another. Shared meaning is organized around certain *field frames*, which hints at the prevailing orthodoxy within the field (Maguire and Hardy, 2009: 149). For example, Ansari, Wijen, and Gray (2013) demonstrate how actors, over a 40-year period, changed their personal framing of climate change policy to move towards a unified field frame and thereby established a consensus around climate issues. Accordingly, this is a collective process as actors "'get outside of their own heads,' take the role of the other, and work to find some collective definition of interest" (Fligstein, 2013: 43). In doing so, discourse coalitions begin to form, which are a crucial component of field structuration since they forge a shared-meaning system that allows actors pursue similar goals. Such coalitions generally regard "a group of actors that, in the context

of an identifiable set of practices, shares the usage of a particular set of story lines over a particular period of time" (Hajer, 2005: 302).

Second, focusing on field-level discursive struggles highlights how the potency of an actor's discursive activity is relative to their position vis-à-vis the position of other actors. Incumbent actors are granted discursive legitimacy—i.e., the "right to speak" (Hardy and Phillips, 1999)—and work to maintain dominant institutional arrangements at the center of the field. Conversely, challengers and new field entrants lurk at the field's periphery, from where they work on destabilizing those discourses furthered by incumbents (Maguire et al., 2004). Tracing shifting positions exposes how actors engage in "position jockeying" as they aim to secure a central spot within the transnational SD field; making moves that others must interpret and respond to (Fligstein and McAdam, 2011: 5). Through this dynamic, actors collectively promote a particular SD discourse, at the expense of another. Field change can also originate from external sources, for example, as a foreign actor seeks entrance or launches a takeover, or due to exogenous shocks such as regulatory reform (Fligstein, 2001). Indeed, the transnational SD field's boundaries—or the limits of "who and what is 'normal', standard and acceptable"—are never fixed and always in jeopardy (Merilainen et al., 2004: 554).

Third, and relatedly, recognizing the salience of when fields enter a crisis, underscores certain critical junctures regarding the construction of business-SD relations. These "periods of contestation" result in the "emergent, sustained contentious interaction between [field] actors utilizing new and innovative forms of action vis-à-vis one another" (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012: 21). This occurs with regard to transnational SD field as disparate actors that normally lack opportunity to engage come together during specialized mega-conferences—usually organized by the United Nations (UN)—to address social and environmental issues on a global scale (Haas, 2002; Lafferty and Eckerberg, 2013). During these events, incumbents and challengers, for a limited period, "face off to capture some gain" (Fligstein and McAdam,

2011: 11); they are the power-arenas where meaning-systems related to SD are produced, broken down, re-built, and maintained (McInerney, 2008).

Overall, applied to business-SD relations, a field perspectiveprovides a unique framework that goes beyond the confines of business alone to conceptualize meaning making as a relational, often contentious, affair between multiple actors. By examining the above discussed field dynamics—shifting field frames, position jockeying, and periods of contention—we aim to demonstrate how, over time, a discursive struggle unfolds, as certain business-SD discourses succeed in becoming dominant, whilst others falter and are marginalized. Accordingly, we pose two research questions: What are the discursive struggles that constitute business-SD relations and how have these shifted over time? How have certain field dynamics led to a dominant understanding of business' role in SD?

7.2.2. Research approach

Selected texts

In attempting to answer the above questions, we base our study within the context of the UN Earth Summits and examine three main bodies of text (see Table 2). First, we used the official outcome document of each Summit, downloaded from each Summits' official website. Although these documents are non-binding, they are agreed to and signed by member-states and are negotiated, produced and amended before, during and sometimes after the Summits. Therefore, they represent a snapshot of the official Summit proceedings (Lafferty and Eckerberg, 2013). Second, we analyzed certain "texts that leave traces" (Phillips et al., 2004: 640) that explicitly sought to either problematize, or legitimate, the idea of business as an SD actor. We selected two extreme cases from a particularly vocal and well-recognized environmental NGO (Friends of the Earth) and from the most prominent representative for business and industry (World Business Council for Sustainable Development[7]). We also

[7] The WBCSD changed in form over the three Summits. In 1992 the group was founded under the name BCSD. In 2002, they added 'World' to their title. Finally, in 2012 the WBCSD partnered with International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), and the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), to

included two key texts from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) that were particularly salient regarding the role of business at the Rio+20 Summit in 2012. Third, we analyzed news articles that covered the Summits during 1992, 2002, and 2012. Newspaper articles are often considered useful for analyzing discursive struggles because of the media's dual role as both mirroring public debate (Beelitz and Merkl-Davies, 2011), whilst actively shaping the character of society by giving meaning to its institutions (Bell, 1995; van Bommel and Spicer, 2011). We analyzed articles from the *Financial Times*, *the Guardian*, *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times*. We selected these newspapers firstly because of their diverse set of contributors including journalists, academics, politicians, business professionals, and members of the public, and secondly because they are relatively distinct in terms of their ideological orientations, and therefore useful in illuminating struggles between viewpoints (Brandenburg, 2006; Stroud et al., 2014).

Table 2 - Corpus of text for article I

	Field actor texts			*News media*			
	Policy	**Business**	**Civil-Soc**	*gar*	*ft*	*nyt*	*wsj*
Rio 1992	Agenda 21 (UN)	Changing Course: A global business perspective on development and the environment (BCSD)	Big Business Moves to Capture Earth Summit (FOE)	*23*	*108*	*48*	*42*
Jo'burg 2002	Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (UN)	Walking the Talk: The Business Case for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)	Clashes with corporate giants (FOE)	*97*	*78*	*17*	*6*

unite under BASD, which "was the official Business and Industry Major Group representative for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development" (BASD, 2012).

Rio+20	The Future We Want (UN); Towards a Green Economy (UNEP); The Business Case for the Green Economy: Sustainable Return on Investment (UNEP)	A Sustainable Path Forward: Business Perspectives on Rio+20 (BASD)	Reclaim the UN from corporate capture (FOE)	*30*	*32*	*5*	*0*

Analytic approach and process

We situate our study within the critical organizational discourse studies tradition (Hardy and Phillips, 1999; Mumby, 2004, 2013). Therefore, our analysis specifically focuses on the dialogical struggle that occurs between field actors seeking to fix the role of business in SD, which becomes "reflected in the privileging of a particular discourse and the marginalization of others" (Keenoy et al., 1997: 150). This approach is useful for field-level studies for two reasons. First, it exposes the mutually constitutive interplay between broader macro-level discourses and dynamics within a field. Without considering intertextuality (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) between field- and macro-level discourses, the transnational SD field would operate in a vacuum, only constitutive of itself. Second, and relatedly, critical organizational discourse analysis focuses on how constituting context "privileges some actors at the expense of others and how broad changes in the discourse result in different constellations of advantage and disadvantage" (Phillips and Hardy, 2011c: 25). In our case, context *is* the transnational SD field; its construction is therefore based on producing, distributing, and consuming texts. Despite the prevalence of certain step-by-step frameworks for critical discourse analysis (Leitch and Palmer, 2010), our approach resonates with Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2010) who largely reject such attempts that aim to impose strict methodological rigor to critical discourse studies (see also Phillips and Oswick, 2012: 26). Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2010: 1214) instead propose moving "more towards stronger conceptual links between discourse, power, and other 'moments' of the social process […], as well as towards

more versatile and porous methodologies that make space for novel, interdisciplinary research designs in the field."

We analyzed our data in three phases. During the first phase, we developed a field narrative of the transnational SD field by engaging deeply with our data—especially with the large set of media articles—to chronicle both "who *did* what, and when" and "who *said* what, and when" (Maguire and Hardy, 2009: 153 emphasis added). In doing so, we could identify shifts over time in terms of: (1) who the main field members are and their respective positons vis-à-vis other actors within the field; (2) the field-frames that signify the main organizing principle for each Summit; and (3) salient contentious periods.

During the second phase, we identified all instances within our corpus of text in which the role of business in SD was referenced. Based on an inductive coding process (see Figure 7) inspired by the inductive stage model of Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2012), we coded all of these instances to create descriptive categories (resulting in over 700 individual codes). For example, we coded the statement: "...business and industry should increase self-regulation. It is time to reboot the Rio+20 summit agenda" as 'regulation' and 'reboot'. We then identified relationships between all the codes and, where significant overlap existed, formed three themes: "change," "control," and "power." As these themes emerged, we noticed that each was constituted by a specific dialectical tension: 'change' was constituted by a struggle between radicalism and conservativism; 'control' by pro-regulation and anti-regulation; and 'power' by bottom-up and top-down. Accordingly, we grouped the poles of each struggle into two discourses: 'transformative' (*radical, pro-regulation,* and *bottom-up* discourses) and 'business-as-usual' (*conservatism*, *anti-regulation*, and *top-down* discourses).

The third phase examined how the three field dynamics we identified in the first phase facilitated the discursive struggles that emerged in the second phase. Regarding the *field positions* dynamic, we engaged with the texts produced by each actor separately—particularly with our key texts from WBCSD and Friends of the Earth—and examined their shifting field position in relation to the specific discourse promoted by that actor. In terms of

shifting *field frames*, we similarly examined how 'winning or losing' a struggle was reflected by the extent to which actors conformed with each Summit's field frame. Lastly, in terms of *contentious periods*, we examined certain events that 'shocked' the entire transnational SD field, such as the entry of new field members or major shifts in actor positions, which also greatly affected each struggle. Overall, by exploring how these three field dynamics influenced the outcome of the discursive struggles, we identified the most salient dynamics that, we argue, facilitated a shift in business' role in SD over the three Summits.

*Figure 7 – Inductive coding process for Article **I***

7.2.3. Findings

The shifting role of business as a SD actor

We find that over a period of two decades, business' role as a SD actor shifts significantly. Business moves from the periphery of the transnational SD field in 1992 where its role is largely *undefined*, to field's center in 2002 after being officially inaugurated by the UN as a SD *partner*. Finally, upon the Summit returning to Rio in 2012, business became integral to the transnational SD field as a *driver* of SD. We illustrate how these shifts occur below by presenting the discursive struggles that constitute business-SD relations during each Summit (see Table 3), including the field dynamics that facilitated a shift in business' role in SD (see Figure 8).

Table 3 – Overview of discursive struggles and claims

	Transformative	**Centrist**	**Business-as-usual**
		Radical vs Conservative	
Change	Radical change needed to overhaul capitalist system	Change must be directed toward partnership and embedding sustainability within corporations	Incremental change within the boundaries of capitalist system
		Pro-regulation vs. Anti-regulation	
Control	Enforceable government regulation must drive sustainable development	National regulation is preferred to international law, and should rather incentivise than control	Free-markets and profits should drive sustainability, not regulation
		Bottom-up vs. Top-down	
Power	Powerful institutions cannot be trusted. Their responsibilities must be kept separate to that of the state	Cooperation between powerful institutions is key – business can either support government, or lead development initiatives	Business should lead sustainability agenda

Figure 8 – Transnational SD field dynamics and the evolution of discursive struggles

Rio 1992

Role of business in SD: Undefined

Position jockeying: Business-as-usual lurking at periphery. Transformative discourses occupy dominant position in centre.

Field frame: 'Time to change'

Contentious periods: Event itself signalling the emergence of SD on an international policy level. Potential to disrupt growth-as-all-expenses perspective.

**Note that the arrows indicate a struggle.*

Johannesburg 2002

Role of business in SD: SD Partner

Position jockeying: Central field position 'up for grabs'. Business-as-usual discourse moves from periphery closer to centre.

Field frame: 'Better together'

Contentious periods: Entrance of business actors and their quick move towards centre

*Note that no struggle occurs between business-as-usual and centrist discourses. Rather, business-as-usual and centrist discourses begin to align with each other, hence the striped line.

Rio+20 - 2012

Role of business: Driver of SD

Position jockeying: Discourse coalition forms between business-as-usual and centrist discourses, which now occupy as central position.

Field frame: 'Greening growth'

Contentious periods: None – field increasingly defined by stability

*The dashed box in 2012 field indicates the discourse coalition

Rio 1992: business role in SD – undefined

The Rio Conference in 1992 was somewhat 'special'. Not only was it the first conference that attracted such an unprecedented collection of international actors including 108 heads of state, 2,400 representatives from civil-society organizations and NGOs, and 10,000 on-site journalists (UN, 1997), but it also set the scene for the proceeding two decades of SD policy, as highlighted by a representative of the World Wildlife Fund: "Rio will be a legacy for many years to come" (Tessa Robertson, pollution-policy officer WWF, in Allen, 1992). The spirit of the event was captured in the Summit's field frame, 'Time for change', as exemplified by the Summit's implementation plan—Agenda 21—which is littered with language indicative of grand change. For example, in its preamble, Agenda 21 states: "[humanity] stands at a defining moment in history" (paragraph 1.1) and that the Agenda "aims at preparing the world for the challenges of the next century" (paragraph 1.3), which requires an "order-of-magnitude" (paragraph 1.4) approach. Yet, that SD would potentially revolutionize our understanding of economic development was not appreciated by all actors – alluding to the first major discursive struggle: radicalism vs. conservativism.

Given our reading of Agenda 21, policy actors seemed keen to further SD as a transformative concept. Similarly, civil society purported a radical SD discourse by, amongst others, emphasizing the need to redefine the ecology-economy relationship, as Helen Denham (1992) of the US-based youth group commented: "treatment of environment and development demands a new international vision." However, business actors—operating as emergent actors on periphery of the transnational SD field—were reluctant to accept any sort of grand systems change. This was evidenced by the Business Council for Sustainable Development (BCSD), the leading business advocacy group led by Swiss billionaire Stephan Schmidheiny, arguing in their manifesto: "[we] call for a long-term view, for far-reaching changes, and for action. But we *do not base our hopes for success on radical changes* in human nature or on the creation of a utopia" (1992, emphasis added). BCSD were therefore clear that whilst change was necessary, it was something that must happen within the confines of

the status quo. Other business actors shared this perspective, as Jan-Olaf Willums, executive director of the ICC Office on Environment, stressed the profits that can be made from appropriating the natural environment: "environment is an asset. Sustainable development is about learning to develop and maintain this asset so we live off the income, not the capital" (Lamb, 1992). Notwithstanding, with both civil society and policy actors inhibiting a center field position, coupled with the hope resting in SD's transformative potential, radical SD discourses dominated at the Earth Summit in 1992.

A much less clearly defined battle concerned the regulation of TNCs. Here, a stalemate tug-of-war transpired between, on the one hand, those urging for increased regulation of businesses, and, on the other, those who imagined SD as a voluntary affair. This exposes the second major struggle between pro-regulation and anti-regulation discourses. Civil society actors largely promoted a pro-regulation discourse, as Richard Tapper of WWF demanded "to see strict rules obliging TNCs to adopt the highest national or international standards in their overseas operations" (Watkins, 1992). However, such sentiments stood in contrast to most major policy actors. For instance, despite referencing the term "regulation" 55 times, it does not appear once in the Agenda 21's four-page chapter dedicated to "Strengthening the role of business and industry." Rather, the term "self-regulation" is preferred: governments are urged to "encourage" and 'incentivize" businesses to become environmentally concerned. Other policy actors followed suit – the US delegation for instance rejecting any increased regulation of businesses by insisting that it would "not let environmentalists shut down the U.S." (Gutfeld, 1992).

In addition to policy actors, business actors promoted anti-regulation discourse. Again, the BCSD played an important role, as Schmidheiny stated in an interview with the Financial Times:

> *…either we resist and we will suffer, or we anticipate the changes and we will have more profits and more personal satisfaction. […] SD will shape the future of our business, and to learn to understand it and shape it is really in our interest. (Simons, 1992)*

Arguably, the BCSD's efforts resembled a foundational attempt to put forward a business case for SD, which had not yet entered business mainstream. But the positive framing of SD by the BCSD—as they 'shape' SD to 'have more profits' (see quote above)—remained confined to business advocacy groups.

In many ways, relations between civil society actors and business were defined by antagonism as the Wall Street Journal put it: "Greens, Industry Face Off at Rio Summit" (Kamm, 1992). Much of this contestation was spurred by the ambiguity surrounding the governance of SD – after all, should SD be driven by big business alone, by big business in partnership with governments and civil society, or by governments and civil society without the direct involvement of big business? These questions capture the third significant struggle between bottom-up and top-down SD discourses. Accordingly, bottom-up SD discourse dismisses powerful actors' control of the Summits and argues that the interests of powerful actors, especially big-business, economic elites and the Bretton Woods Institutions, have resulted in sustainability related issues. Skepticism regarding the intentions of powerful organizations often manifests as TNCs are accused of undermining the Summit's policy process, or, as Andrew Lees of Friends of the Earth, stated: "big business is trying to capture the agenda at the Earth Summit so that it can pursue its own version sustainable development" (1992). Conversely, a top-down SD discourse rejects such claims – ICC UK director, Richard Bate, addressed the above accusations of TNCs manipulating Summit outcomes as "absolute nonsense" (Cowe, 1992). Instead, resources of powerful actors are cast as advantageous, if not essential; proponents of a top-down discourse thus proposed that "the Summit will fail if it does not adopt a businesslike approach to matters which are all too often colored by emotion allied to special interests" (Clark, 1992).

In sum, Rio set the scene for discursive battle between, on the one hand, radical, pro-regulation, and bottom-up SD discourses (*transformative*) and, on the other hand, conservative, anti-regulation, top-down discourses (*business-as-usual*). Arguably, due to the momentous spirit of the event, radical tenets of transformative discourses dominated.

Furthermore, given the disjointedness between two central field actors—civil society and policy makers—coupled with disagreement amongst business actors themselves as to whether SD was good for business, the role of business in SD at this point was largely *undefined*, and, we felt, at times confused. However, a decade later during the Johannesburg Summit this changed significantly.

Johannesburg 2002: Business as a partner in SD

Rio's successor, the Johannesburg Summit, was attended by 22,000 people including 100 heads of state and 10,000 delegates from civil society organizations (UN, 2006). Notably, the attendance of the private sector with over 2000 representatives from 700 businesses, including 50 CEOs, was unprecedented for a UN conference (BASD in Lamont, 2002). As the FT put it: "The Johannesburg Summit will be crucial in determining whether business comes to be seen as the hero or villain of sustainable development" (Beattie and Houlder, 2002). The private sector was recognized as a 'partner' of SD, for example, as evidenced during a much-celebrated speech by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan (2002):

> *[…] more and more we are realizing that it is only by mobilizing the corporate sector that we can make significant progress […]. The corporate sector need not wait for governments to take decisions for them to take initiatives.*

The act of legitimating business as a SD partner sparked a particularly contentious period for the transnational SD field and was, we argue, a decisive start to a shift in business' role in SD: "The United Nations is delivering a new message at the [Summit]: It is open for business" (Ball, 2002). This development included an influx of field members, notably business associations and business leaders, and was accompanied by new development mechanisms such as Type II Partnerships that were specifically designed in include the private sector into the UN's governance system (Pinkse and Kolk, 2012). The transnational SD field's boundary was thus, in some ways, torn down to accommodate a new meaning system, which included a new discursive repertoire that both field incumbents and entrants could associate with,

which included terms such as 'win-wins'. Leading this march was the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD); a continuation of the BCSD that featured in Rio ten years earlier. The WBCSD made its mark at the Summit by unveiling its seminal publication—*Walking the Talk: The Business Case for Sustainable Development*—co-authored by three business-SD heavyweights: Chad Holliday (CEO of Du Pont), Stephan Schmidheiny (Chairman of Eternit Group), and Philip Watts (Chairman, Royal Dutch Shell). In its introduction, the authors, at length, argue:

> *For the past decade or so we in the WBCSD have been championing a term [SD] that is unknown to most of the world's inhabitants but is universally known among environment and development actors and thinkers, where it seems to mildly annoy them all.*

The WBCSD, in aiming to provide clarity on business-SD relations, were likewise attempting to secure definitional authority over business-SD relations. Coupled with the conference, being sponsored financially by TNCs, including, amongst others, HP and Daimler Chrysler (Mason and Beattie, 2002), a significant shift in the position of business within the transnational SD field was signaled. This was further buttressed by previously antagonistic actors such as Greenpeace and BP 'joining forces' at a WBCSD organized event to stress their shared commitment to endorse policy commitments to stem climate change: "Their partnership, though limited, was emblematic of a new view of environmental problem-solving that emerged at the United Nations conference" (Revkin, 2002). Crucially, whereas new field entrants usually lack social and economic capital to immediately affect field structuration (Fligstein and McAdam, 2011), business actors in this case already possessed significant resources. In addition, the business-as-usual discourses espoused by new entrants reinforced the UN's preexisting market-based ideology (Banerjee, 2003). Therefore, business actors were able to capitalize on the Summit's field frame—'Better Together'—and quickly start their move towards the center of the field.

Given these developments, we noticed how struggles between discourses evolved considerably. On the one hand, top-down SD discourse gradually gained prominence given

that large TNCs were increasingly considered important for SD: "an encouraging sign that the U.N. is finally starting to understand that the best way to help the developing world over the long term is to make it a place where corporations can reliably make a buck" (Ball, 2002). On the other hand, both pro-regulation and bottoms-up SD discourses only increased their distrust towards business' involvement with SD. That the WBCSD was led by executives from resource intensive industries, including fossil-fuels (Philip Watts), cement (Stephan Schmidheiny) and chemicals (Chad Holliday), only furthered discontent of civil society organizations. As such, direct struggle ensued as several environmental NGOs, during an official UN press conference, collectively accused TNCs of 'hijacking' the Summit: "Corporate lobby groups used the Earth Summit as a platform from which to redefine their role, from that of polluters to that of partners in sustainable development" (FOE, 2002; Townsend, 2002; UN WSSD, 2002). This sentiment was echoed in Tony Juniper's (2002b) accusation of the ICC of "blocking the agreement of several international environmental standards, including the Kyoto protocol on climate change." However, the ICC responded by propagating a centrist discourse, as their director, Lord Holme (2002), responded to Juniper's comments:

> *The stereotype he perpetuates is that business resists all regulation in the sacred name of free markets. This is untrue. [The ICC], which he singled out for criticism, represents businesses that are, in general, strongly in favour of improved reporting and appropriate regulation.*

Centrist discourses, acting to mediate the extreme poles, germinated during, or at least some time surrounding, the Johannesburg Summit. For instance, the WBCSD (2002: 8) were "now more convinced than ever that companies can do themselves good through doing right for society at large and the environment. […] It is not 'either/or'. The new paradigm is 'and also'." There was finally a vocabulary that reconciled the starkly contrasting discursive battles of Rio 1992. Policy actors were also increasingly in favor of centrist approaches. For example, Steve Hilton (2002), a policy advisor to British Conservative Party wrote an article in the Guardian praising win-win scenarios between ecology and economy, arguing that "it is

possible for businesses to combine profit-making with the principles of sustainable development." This is also noticeable within the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (UN, 2002: 60), which promoted "balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development." In addition, there was an abundant reference to partnerships in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (mentioned 54 times) between business, civil society and governments.

Rio+20: Business as a driver of SD

Two decades after the first Earth Summit in Rio, the Summit was again held in Brazilian capital. Civil society and business presence was strong with over 50,000 organizations attending (Watts, 2012), of which 2000 were "business leaders" (Rio+20 Corporate Sustainability Forum, 2012). Perhaps most importantly, the private sector was framed as the driver of the Green Economy, which was one of the two Summit themes (the other being redesigning SD's governance framework). The underlying tenet of the Green Economy concept is that "the greening of economies need not be a drag on growth [rather] has the potential to be a new engine of growth" (UNEP, 2011: 16). In other words, from a business perspective: "[we] need to move from protecting the environment from business to using business to protect the environment" (Potočnik, 2012).

As the role of business became essential to providing the technology and investment needed to advance the Green Economy, governments were increasingly placed in a supportive role. For example, as stated in the Summit's outcome document, *The Future We Want* (authored by Pavan Sukhdev, a Deutsche Bank executive on sabbatical): "national regulatory and policy frameworks [should] *enable* business and industry to advance sustainable development initiatives" (UN, 2012). Unlike the Johannesburg Summit, UN organizations, particularly UNEP, stressed the role of market mechanisms and private investment as crucial in facilitating the transition towards a Green Economy. In a concluding paragraph of their colossal 631-page *Towards a Green Economy* report, UNEP (2011: 628) states:

> *Although the bulk of the investments required for the green transformation will come from the private sector, public policy will also play a leading role in overcoming distortions introduced by perverse subsidies and externalised costs. In addition, public investment will be required to jump-start an effective transition to a green economy.*

Based on our interpretation, the private sector is foregrounded as somehow more responsible for the Green Economy, whereas the public sector, despite being referred to as 'key', seems to be charged only with jump-starting the process and cleaning up externalities after business does the job. Highlighting the role of business is also evident by UNEP releasing another report that ran alongside the *Towards a Green Economy* report titled: *The Business Case for the Green Economy: Sustainable Return on Investment* (UNEP, 2012: 4) in which they showcase "the tremendous opportunities that business can capitalize on by transitioning to a […] Green Economy."

The private sector was now, to a large degree, seen as integral to the conference and its position within the field concentrated in the center alongside policy makers and mainstream civil society actors. This close bundling of major players had particular implications for the unfolding of discursive struggles since these actors, as a collective, neither ascribe solely to business-as-usual discourses, nor to transformative discourses. Instead, central actors become embedded within a discourse coalition involving business-as-usual and centrist discourses, as expressed by the BASD (2012: 2):

> *Business has an obligation to broaden and deepen its engagement, to explore new means of partnering and addressing a wide range of challenges, and to work with government to support the enabling environment, specifically market mechanisms which encourage innovation, in order to address the sustainability challenges at the scale necessary.*

At its core, the discourse coalition relies upon business-as-usual discourses; the quote above highlights top-down approaches to solving social and environmental challenges through an ideology of market-based capitalism. Centrist discourses are a non-core element of the discourse coalition and provide the moderated vocabulary—in the quote above, emphasizing

partnership and incremental change needed to address a wide range of challenges—that actors operating in the field center require to form a shared-meaning system. In doing so, disparate actors can collectively relate to, and pursue, the Summit's 'Greening Growth' field frame.

Actors that reject the discourse coalition risk becoming marginalized. This is illustrated by a schism that unfolds between certain environmental NGOs. On the one hand, what some might consider mainstream NGOs such as Greenpeace and WWF changed their previously critical tone regarding the use of market-based mechanisms to solve environmental issues, especially with regard to the EU emissions trading scheme. WWF were, for instance, particularly emphatic about the idea valuing nature in economic terms; promoted as part of the Valuing Natural Capital Initiative. On the other hand, more 'radical' actors, such as local Brazilian civil society organization, Justiça nos Trilhos, were less enthusiastic of SD's marketization: "It's a shame. Many people should be questioning this" (Barnes, 2012). However, such claims were often disregarded by a now powerful coalition which also included state actors, such as Pascal Canfin, the French development minister, who "denied that the green economy was a Trojan horse for free market and big business" (Chrisafis, 2012). In all, the above findings highlight how, over a period of twenty years, previously antagonistic actors became embedded within a discourse coalition that, whilst producing a dominant understanding of business' role in SD, has also marginalized those understandings and actors that do not adhere to its core tenets.

7.2.4. Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this article was to explore the discursive struggles and field dynamics that led to a dominant understanding of business' role in SD. We were particularly interested in expanding the current literature's focus on corporate disclosures to include voices of other key SD actors that, vis-à-vis business actors, shape business-SD relations. Accordingly, we adopted a field perspective (Fligstein and McAdam, 2011) and based our study within the context of the UN Earth Summits, a contentious discursive space where actors battle every

10 years for definitional control over what SD means for business and what business means for SD (Dodds et al., 2012). In doing so, we highlighted two field dynamics that we argue facilitated a shift in the role of business in SD from being largely undefined in 1992 to a SD partner in 2002 and, ultimately, an integral driver of SD in 2012. The first field dynamic was an influx of business actors during the Johannesburg Summit in 2002: business was not only unofficially inaugurated by Secretary-General Kofi Annan (2002), but officially incorporated into new forms of governing the global commons, amongst others, Type II Partnerships. This significant period of contention resulted in boundaries of the transnational SD field imploding as previously established understandings of business-SD relations, including actor positions within the SD field, entered into a state of flux. Given these developments, coupled with the need for a shared vocabulary that could mediate seemingly irreconcilable tensions between 'transformative' and 'business-as-usual' discourses, a third set of 'centrist' discourses emerged during the Johannesburg Summit in 2002. This laid the foundation for the second field dynamic—the forming of a discourse coalition between centrist and business-as-usual discourses—which occurred ten years later during the Rio+20 Summit and ultimately led to a dominant understanding of business' role in SD. In the ensuing section, we discuss how our study contributes to literature on business-SD relations, including implications for the field of SD and scholars interested in the business-nature-society interface.

Despite literature on SD frequently contrasting two opposing discourses—weak vs. strong sustainability—our study suggests an alternative tension between transformative vs. business-as-usual discourses. Indeed, elements of this dichotomy overlap in some respects with previous attempts to map SD approaches. For example, our finding regarding the struggle of radicalism vs. conservativism is supported by Hopwood et al's (2005) distinction between 'status quo', 'reform', and 'transformation' views of SD. However, whereas many existing studies focus on the tension between ecological and technocratic/anthropogenic worldviews (Colby, 1991; Olsen et al., 1992), we specifically emphasized the relationship

between business and the natural environment. This is reflected in our distinction between transformative and business-as-usual discourses incorporating, amongst others, attitudes about the power of governing institutions and regulation of TNCs. Since the findings of our study largely emerged inductively rather than applying the weak vs. strong framework to business-SD phenomena, we provide a distinction between SD discourses that is more fittingly related to, in particular, business and its engagement with SD. This is important because, as our study emphasizes, business involvement with SD is fundamental to understanding SD itself.

Crucially, whether either transformative or business-as-usual discourses dominate is dependent on successfully seizing a third set of centrist discourses that provide a nuanced middle-ground position that mediates between the two extremes (Colby, 1991; Hopwood et al., 2005; Olsen et al., 1992). Of course, middle-ground discourses are well referenced in business-SD literature (Milne et al., 2009; Prasad and Elmes, 2005) as organizations often employ a 'not too hot, not too cold' Goldilocks approach by neither entirely supporting the status quo, nor wanting to seem to endorse ecocentric values (Livesey, 2002c). In our case, middle ground positions were evident as centrist discourses contained elements of partnership between government *and* business, or win-wins between profits *and* the environment. However, centrist discourses, as we noted, are only meaningful in relation to other evolving discursive struggles and therefore cannot in isolation define the transnational SD field. This underscores Tinker et al's (1991: 46) assertion: "'middle ground' is not an 'eternal category' but is disputed territory that changes with struggles and conflicts" (in Milne et al., 2009: 1245). We take this a step further by illustrating how these struggles and conflicts constituted a discourse coalition that, in our case, resulted in business' role in SD being underpinned by an economic, market-based logic.

This dominant understanding most prominently materialized during Rio+20 where centrist and business-as-usual discourses began to align, and, as a collective, marginalized transformative discourses as idealistic, doctrinaire and extreme. Although not directly

congruent, the 'partnership' between discourses resonates with Hajer's (Hajer, 1997) notion of a discourse coalition. In this vein, discourse coalitions bring together multiple, often contending, storylines, practices and routines organized around a unifying discourse (see also Lefsrud and Meyer, 2012; Meyer and Höllerer, 2010). Hajer (1997), based on his analysis of the emergence of ecological modernization discourse, stresses the "interaction and coalescence of discourses […] that constantly adjusts, transforms, resists, or reinvents social arrangements." In a similar vein, as the discursive struggles we identified evolved over time, the coalition between business-as-usual and centrist discourses similarly evolved, becoming increasingly interwoven. Through creating this shared understanding, over time the struggle between transformative and business-as-usual discourses that persisted during the 1992 and 2002 Summits became diluted. However, it is important to mention that the coalition in many ways represents "meaning in the service of power" (Fairclough, 1995b: 14). As such, the coalition's vagueness functions both to conceal some of the contradictions that underpin business-SD relations, and acts as a legitimizing tool. Nonetheless, the coalition in a sense remains 'productive' as it provides a common language that disparate actors in the field's center require to engage in dialogue – i.e., through concepts such as Green Economy and inclusive growth. This is what Hajer (1997) refers to as the "communicative miracle" of a discourse coalition as divergent actors are able to maintain their distinctiveness without forgoing a shared understanding of issues.

Our adaptation of Hajer's discourse coalition concept resonates with Tregidga et al's (2015) reference to a hegemonic discourse of SD. In this respect, the authors, in their review of research on corporate SD discourses, illustrate how such discourses reproduce the status-quo and therefore perpetuate "a dominance of capitalist and economic ideology (markets, profit, growth) over the social and the environmental" (Tregidga et al., 2015: 23). Indeed, the discourse coalition referenced in this article is similarly dominated by what we referred to as business-as-usual discourses. In addition, comparable to how corporate discourse of SD often "glosses over conflicts of interest subsumed under the rubric of [SD]" (Livesey, 2002c:

232), so does the discourse coalition's inherent fuzziness mask the actual identity of some of its adherents – e.g., as many of its founders (such as Phillip Watts of Shell) hail from industries where tradeoffs between ecology and economy are inevitable. Interestingly, Tregidga, Milne, and Kearins (2014) have elsewhere argued that corporations resist change towards more sustainable business practices by perpetually engaging in identity transformations, or claiming to be that which they are not. Nevertheless, as we have stressed in this article, it is not merely due to the intent of business actors that business-SD relations, and indeed SD more generally, become embedded within a discourse coalition. Instead, this occurs through the efforts of multiple actors who, as an aggregate, engage in field structuration. In this respect, we concur with Levy and Newell's (2005: 74–75) formulation of this complex power-play between actors as they "engage in negotiation, alliance formation, and compromise, in an effort to build a hegemonic coalition of firms, governmental agencies, NGOs, and intellectuals with the capacity to establish policies, norms, and institutions."

Importantly, the interaction between coalition members would not have been possible without transnational fora—in our case, the UN Earth Summits—that facilitated the interaction of disparate actors, normally not associated with one another, in a physical space. Although our study's main focus was not necessarily about the inner workings of Earth Summits—as we instead focused on discourses surrounding the Summits—we do stress the importance of taking into consideration how such international fora influence SD, including the role of business in SD (Bäckstrand, 2006; Lafferty and Eckerberg, 2013). Springett (2013: 75) stresses this point as she reflects on the evolution of SD discourse over the past decade: "[these] fora have underlined the power that corporates can exercise, in seizing a level of 'legitimacy' over the debate while appropriating it to represent something more comfortably in keeping with neo-liberal corporate agendas" (see also Eden, 1999).

Despite their importance, organization scholars have only recently begun to focus on how such events shape the business-society-environment interface (Ansari et al., 2013; Banerjee, 2012a; Carter et al., 2011; Hardy and Maguire, 2010; Schussler et al., 2014). The importance

of such fora was reflected during Johannesburg Summit, which not only received scant scholarly attention, but also, as our dataset illustrated, limited media attention. Yet, as we demonstrated in our findings, certain developments occurred during the Johannesburg Summit that were somewhat unprecedented, including, for instance, that the Summit was funded by TNCs (Mason and Beattie, 2002), and that Greenpeace and BP were brought together by the WBCSD to express their unified support for the Kyoto Protocol (Newell and J. Timmons, 2016: 171). Precisely these sorts of shocks prompted the legitimation of corporate interests as an integral part of the transnational SD field. One could certainly argue that mainstream policy actors such as the UN have always been sympathetic toward TNCs, largely because of their favorable stance on free-trade and globalization (Banerjee, 2012). Yet, what is striking is how, upon business actors entering the transnational SD field *en masse* around the time of the Johannesburg Summit, major NGOs gradually started to 'let bygones be bygones'. They began to accept and later even strongly endorse market-based mechanisms to address SD issues, a practice that many NGOs fervently denounced during the Rio Summit in 1992 (Ansari et al., 2013).

7.2.5. Limitations, future research and implications

There are certain limitations to our study. For example, that the shifting role of business in SD, including the relationship between actors within the transnational SD field, contrasts so starkly is in part due to our study skipping the years between Summits. We focused specifically on each Earth Summit as these were salient contentious periods for the transnational SD field. Notwithstanding, other contentious periods, such as recent global financial crisis (Böhm et al., 2012), could provide fruitful research opportunities. Additionally, by focusing on the Summits which have a strong environmental focus, we neglected social issues such as poverty and the rights of indigenous peoples, a general a shortcoming of the UN's approach to SD (see Barkemeyer et al., 2014). As such, future research should explore how social issues are constructed by field dynamics. Besides foregrounding ecological sustainability, we recognize that we also gave prominence to

Western views of economy-ecology relationship. This was mainly due to our intent to explore the efforts of 'major players' which are mostly Western despite the conference's location in developing countries. In addition, our data set reflected this limitation given that we drew on outcome documents, key texts, and newspaper articles representative of a Western world view. Though outside the scope of this research, future studies could consider how data generated from actors residing in the Global South shape SD (e.g., Morgan et al., 2016). Despite these limitations, our findings demonstrate certain implications for the current state of business-SD relations, and for the field of SD itself.

Perhaps the most explicit implication of this study is that business actors, in partnership with other civil society and policy actors within the coalition, can steer the agenda of SD. Given this agenda-setting privilege, those matters which stand in contrast to the interests of the coalition may be omitted from what is considered materially important to SD. This is particularly worrying because many SD issues, such as environmental sustainability, operate on a systems level; silencing certain elements can have particularly harmful consequences for the system as a whole (Whiteman et al., 2013). For example, certain greenhouse gasses, in particular methane, do not receive near the celebrity status of other 'less-harmful' gases such as carbon dioxide (Kluger, 2011). Similarly, whilst chemical and food waste each receive their own target within the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, the disposal of electronic waste hardly features (Leach, 2016; UNDESA, 2015). Perhaps issues such as these, despite their importance to social and environmental welfare, are silenced from the SD agenda because powerful actors within the coalition have not yet succeeded in creating win-win solutions – i.e., they are not profitable. This alludes to the potential for future research to explicitly explore instances in which issues are silenced, including the power effects therein (e.g., Brown, 2005). Relatedly, future research should consider those actors that are particularly disadvantaged by being silenced – are the silenced being ignored, or even suppressed? As Sherlock Holmes famously investigated "why did the dog not bark in the night-time?," so should researchers question the increasingly muffled bark of many 'radical' civil society

organizations. Not only could such enquiries further our understanding SD, but giving voice to what remains unsaid or unheard could have emancipatory outcomes for silenced actors.

A second implication highlighted in this article is that Earth Summits—insistent on finding practical solutions to complex issues by requesting consensus amongst its members—have arguably contributed to the stagnation and de-radicalizing of SD. As such, instead of the Summits acting as a platform for change, Rio+20's focus in particular became one of field maintenance as the Summit began to reinforce and perpetuate already established logics. Indeed, although such events are characterized as a space of conflict, as fields mature, events increasingly become defined by agreement (Garud, 2008; Lampel and Meyer, 2008). We highlighted how this occurs through the formation of a discourse coalition, which would not have emerged without actors being brought together to negotiate a common, middle-ground position as espoused by centrist discourses. Therefore, despite providing actors with a unique platform to repeatedly engage in search for positions of compromise, any compromise will likely be more in favor of central, dominant actors (e.g., TNCs) than those on the periphery (Fligstein, 2001). This raises concerns regarding the democratic ideals of UN summits and conferences; after all, it is unlikely that business would have gained such influence without having attended Earth Summits.

A third, and final, implication of this study is that the transnational SD field has acquired such an extensive array of disparate actors—attaching themselves to an all-encompassing understanding of SD—that it verges on "plunging into meaninglessness" (US National Science Foundation, 2000 in Hopwood et al., 2005: 40). As this melting pot, so to speak, continues to accommodate more meaning and acquire an increasing number of diverse actors, it enters a precarious state of flux. On the one hand, the drawback is that radical discourses aiming to overthrow the coalition will likely be co-opted, their critique absorbed into the coalition (e.g., de Lange et al., 2016). On the other hand, that the transnational SD field continues to reinvent itself is a strong sign that it has yet to stabilize completely. This opens opportunities to conceptualize SD as more inclusive and less in favor of forms of

economic growth that are at the expense of environmental and social wellbeing. However, we are concerned that management and organization academics, surprisingly (or maybe not), seem to have joined the discourse coalition at best, or at worst, continue to perpetuate a business-as-usual discourse through their research (Orlitzky et al., 2003). In this regard, although we agree with Hahn et al's (2015) suggestion that corporate sustainability scholars both broaden and deepen their research focus, we resonate with Tregidga et al's (2015b) proposition that academics consider their work as a form of political activism.

Extending Tregidga et al's (2015) call, which focuses largely on hegemonic resistance as practised discursively, we suggest that corporate sustainability scholars be materially active as well. Here, the notion of critical performativity is a useful means for academics to subvert corporate sustainability practices by intervening in organizational life (e.g., Banerjee, 2012b; Prasad and Mills, 2010; Wickert and Schaefer, 2015). As recently suggested by Cabantous et al (2016), in their revamped conceptualization of earlier work on critical performativity (i.e., Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Spicer et al., 2009), scholars should take practical steps towards the betterment of organizations that involves consideration for both discursive and material practices. Accordingly, we as academics must not shy away from being physically present "on the front lines" by, in relation to our study, attending national and international fora to directly influence the construction of business' role in SD. Engagement with influential business actors (e.g., WBCSD) "through selective and informed critical-constructive questioning" (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012: 546)—which is our intention as a next step in this broader research project—is key to this aim, whilst also recognizing the implications of both our own physical intervention and non-human objects. Regarding this latter point, taking a critical performativity perspective involves considering resistance towards hegemonic corporate sustainability discourse as implicated by the sociomaterial effects of, for instance, the researcher's analytic tools (Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009), the use of two-by-two matrices (Pollock and D'Adderio, 2012), and the materiality of the body (Redclift, 2005). This is of course supplemented by the discursive type activism as proposed by Tregidga et al

(2015). In doing so, academics may regain both the physical and ideological zest needed to re-conceptualize SD and thereby disrupt discourses deemed unfit for a finite planet.

7.3. Article II

Drilling their own graves: How the European oil and gas supermajors avoid sustainability tensions through mythmaking

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This study explores how tensions between economic growth and environmental protection are avoided through organizational mythmaking. By examining the CEO-speak of the European oil and gas supermajors about climate change, we demonstrate two main functions of mythmaking: "anchoring" and "transferring." We show how these functions facilitate in disregarding, diverting, and/or displacing sustainability tensions by constructing certain defensive responses: (i) regression, or retreating to the comforts of past familiarities, (ii) fantasy, or escaping the harsh reality that fossil fuels and climate change are indeed irreconcilable, and (iii) projecting, or blaming external actors for failing to address climate change. By highlighting the effects of enacting these defensive responses, we illustrate how the European oil and gas supermajors self-determine both their inability and unwillingness to substantively address the complexities of climate change. We thus argue that defensive responses are not necessarily a form of mismanagement as the literature commonly asserts, but a strategic resource that, whilst potentially having productive outcomes for a firm in the short-run, are unsustainable for the natural environment in both the short- and long-run.

[…] *the question of scientific evidence should be treated as settled. But, this conclusion is not accepted by many in our industry because they do not want to acknowledge an existential threat to their business.*

Lord John Browne, former CEO of BP, London 2014

Corporate sustainability confronts organizations with interdependent economic, social, and environmental concerns (Elkington, 1998). Whilst these three dimensions must be considered together in order to contribute to sustainable development (Gladwin et al., 1995), firms tend to discriminate against social and environmental concerns in favor of financial returns (McWilliams and Siegel, 2000). In order to overcome this dilemma, scholars increasingly draw from paradox theory which regards organizations as inherently conflictual sites, stressing that tensions, if properly harnessed "can be powerful to enable peak performance" (Smith and Lewis, 2011: 395). Applied to the context of corporate sustainability, scholars argue that instead of ignoring tensions between economic, social, and environmental dimensions, firms should instead accept and embrace these often contradictory demands simultaneously (Berger et al., 2007; Gao and Bansal, 2013; Hahn et al., 2014; Hahn et al., 2015). Based on this perspective, foregoing the temptation to ignore sustainability tensions allows managers to confront complexity directly, and, in doing so, potentially transcend the otherwise stifling trichotomy of economic, social, and environmental dimensions. This is commonly referred to as a "paradox approach" or "integrative view" on corporate sustainability (for overview see Van der Byl and Slawinski, 2015).

Whilst this literature demonstrates the usefulness of a paradox perspective for confronting and embracing sustainably tensions—thereby highlighting the productive side of embracing complexity—it has largely overlooked defensive responses by which firms aim to avoid sustainability tensions; i.e., the apparently unproductive side of ignoring tensions by discounting complexity. This gap persists despite many of the earlier paradox studies explicitly cautioning against defensive reactions given the potentially detrimental

consequences for organizational survival (Leonard-Barton, 1992; Sundaramurthy and Lewis, 2003; Vince and Broussine, 1996). Accordingly, there have been several calls to further investigate, as Schad et al (2016: 39) in their review of the past 25 years of paradox literature suggest that scholars explore: "[how] defense mechanisms can cause good intentions to result in undesired outcomes." We heed to these calls and focus specifically on the defensive responses that firms employ to avoid sustainability tensions, including how this affects the way they engage with sustainability issues such as climate change. To do so, we analyzed CEO-speak (Amernic and Craig, 2006) of the European supermajors—BP, Shell and Total—or instances in which their CEO addressed climate change issues in corporate reports, in the media, and in speeches. Situating our study within a critical-interpretivist tradition (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Mumby, 1987), we are interested in how the supermajors engage with sustainability tensions to obfuscate the complexities associated with climate change (see also Putnam et al., 2016: 109). To conceptualize this process, we draw from the concept of organizational mythmaking as a symbolic act that reduces anxiety stemming from the unknown by simplifying complex or tension-laden situations (Boje et al., 1982; Brown, 1994; Filby and Willmott, 1988; Wright and Nyberg, 2014b).

Our findings illustrate how the construction of three myths—*the techno-fix*, *Promethean oil man,* and *climate partnerships*—facilitates the avoidance of sustainability tensions by constructing certain defense mechanisms. Myths therefore either anchor responses deep within well-established understandings or practices that are by themselves environmentally harmful, or transfer the response's focus away from the source of the problem (i.e., the point at which fossil fuels are extracted from the ground), and relocate tensions elsewhere, often to an external actor such as the state. By illustrating the effects of organizational mythmaking, we argue that the supermajors become increasingly locked into a self-referential myopia that not only fosters an inability to adapt to climate change, but also significantly limits their potential to imagine any alternative energy future not coherent with the myths they themselves create and enact. Our study mainly contributes to the literature on paradox and

corporate sustainability by showing how sustainability tensions are actively avoided through symbolic action. This is important because instead of exposing the "bizarre" contradiction between fossil-fuel based growth and climate change mitigation (Wright and Nyberg, 2015b), sustainability tensions are repressed, which may have particularly devastating consequences for the natural environment.

7.3.1. Theoretical framing

Organizational paradox and corporate sustainability

Responses to tensions, contradictions, and paradox regarding sustainability are generally conceptualized in three ways. The first regards acceptance – actors acknowledge paradoxes as unsolvable puzzles that are part of everyday existence (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Since there is no opposition toward tensions per se, managers improvise when confronted and thus avoid the difficulties and risks involved with attempting a controlled resolution. The paradox is left open, and Pandora's box remains shut (Beech et al., 2004). Regarding corporate sustainability, acceptance strategies may work well on an individual level. For example, organizations can ensure that employees are provided with 'green platforms' that foster transparent, constructive debate and, in doing so, facilitate employees sharing their views on sustainability (Hahn et al., 2014). However, on an organizational level, acceptance strategies—or 'sitting back' while change unfolds—are arguably less likely to be effective given that organizations could face, inter alia, legitimacy threats from stakeholders with contending views. This is especially the case with large, multinational firms operating in developing countries, which "are simultaneously challenged by a multitude of […] issues and environmental demands are characterized by high dynamism, complexity, and heterogeneity" (Scherer, et al., 2013: 275).

The second strategy involves firms proactively confronting sustainability tensions (Lewis, 2000; Vince and Broussine, 1996). As indicated by Poole and Van de Ven (1989), this can be achieved either by *synthesizing* or *separating* tensions. On the one hand, regarding the latter, tensions are rendered manageable by compartmentalizing conflicting poles (Smith and

Lewis, 2011). An extreme form of separation occurs, for instance, when an entire organization splits in order to better manage tensions, as evidenced by E.ON, one of Germany's 'Big 4' energy providers, severing its fossil fuel business from its renewables business and forming two separate business entities (Timperley, 2016). On the other hand, when proactively responding to paradox by *synthesis,* tensions are forged into a new form; as an outcome, tensions are understood as complex interdependencies, as opposed to contradictions (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). For example, Slawinski and Bansal (2015) in their study of the Alberta oil sands highlight how some firms, instead of polarizing short- and long-term perspectives, creatively juxtaposed these so to better manage temporal tensions related to climate change. This is indicative of 'paradox thinking' – a cognitive frame that enables the accommodation of conflicting yet interrelated sustainability dimensions (Hahn et al., 2015)

A third strategy, which is widely undertheorized in the sustainability literature, concerns a defensive strategy where paradox is avoided. Here, scholars draw from Freudian psychoanalytic theory which emphasizes how individuals respond defensively in situations that are tension-laden and cause anxiety (Dey et al., 2016). Such defensive responses regard "any policy or action that prevents someone (or some system) from experiencing embarrassment or threat, and simultaneously prevents anyone from correcting the causes of the embarrassment or threat" (Argyris, 1993: 40). Typical examples include, amongst others: *projecting* negativity onto others, *repressing* unpleasant emotions or thoughts, and *regressing* to previous actions that once provided solace (Lewis, 2000; Vince and Broussine, 1996). Attempting to avoid tensions this way is, however, considered counterproductive as, in the long term, avoidance intensifies complexity, creates vicious cycles, and produces negative feedback loops (Lewis, 2000). Vince and Broussine (1996) show, for example, how actors engage in forms of repression by blocking their awareness of tensions, yet in turn, fueling self-referential cycles while bolstering their confidence. Similarly, Leonard-Barton (1992) illustrates how when confronted with the need for innovation that supersedes core

competencies, firms sometimes engage in regression as a defense response; retreating to the comforts of past practices. Denial also plays an important role as a defensive mechanism (Fotaki, 2010). This sort of behavior is evidenced by corporate scandals such as Enron, WorldCom, and Tyco: managers lose sight of 'the bigger picture' and relentlessly pursue a profit objective irrespective of ethical tensions and, even upon realizing their misconduct, refuse to accept an unpleasant reality (Hall et al., 2007).

Overall, despite most of the above studies focusing on how embracing sustainability tensions can have productive outcomes, the other side of the paradox coin—i.e., unproductive defensive responses—has received scant attention in corporate sustainability literature. Nonetheless, how defense mechanisms facilitate the avoidance of sustainability tensions is of particular importance because sustainability issues such as climate change pose high levels of complexity which may overburden firms, especially companies most threatened by the complexities of climate change (Levy and Lichtenstein 2011). Indeed, many companies find it difficult, if not impossible, to embrace sustainability tensions because their core product inevitability results in *tradeoffs* between economic and environmental concerns (Hahn et al., 2010). Particularly for companies such as fossil fuel companies, surrendering to a zero-sum game between fossil fuels and climate change would be deemed by some stakeholders as "throwing in the towel." In this vein, fossil fuel companies would be conceding to an unpopular choice in favor of financial success over dangerous climate change, which may result in serious legitimacy issues (Wright and Nyberg, 2015a). Trying to shun and even manipulate sustainability tensions is arguably likely; after all, it is well evidenced that firms sometimes expend substantial resources influencing stakeholder perceptions through impression management strategies to appear engaged with sustainability issues (Hooghiemstra, 2000; van Halderen et al., 2016). However, an impression management lens does not suffice to explore paradox avoidance given that it mostly concerns the deliberate manipulation of stakeholder perceptions, which contrasts with the sort of reactive defense responses as provoked by paradox. As such, an alternative lens is necessary that specifically

addresses the types of defensive responses that are triggered to avoid complexity. To address this shortcoming, we draw from the concept of organizational mythmaking, which incorporates aspects of the three responses discussed above.

Organizational mythmaking

The use of myth in organization studies has a longstanding pedigree (Boje et al., 1982; Brown, 1994; Filby and Willmott, 1988; Ganzin et al., 2014), playing a particularly significant role with regard to climate change (Farmer and Cook, 2013: 445; Hulme, 2009: 340). Myths are encapsulated in the symbols—e.g., logos, rituals, slogans, brands, stories—that Putnam (1983: 40) argues are "not simply reflections of organizational meanings; they are ongoing processes the constitute organizational life." Mythmaking thus constructs the meaning structures necessary to foster shared understandings within organizations (Boje et al., 1982). Whilst the concept of mythmaking has been employed is many ways, we draw largely from Barthes' (1972) seminal *Mythologies*, which we interpret as fulfilling a dual function in terms of both acting as a mechanism that produces shared meaning in times of complexity, and as a means to obfuscate existing power inequalities (see also Filby and Willmott, 1988).

First, mythmaking is most salient in times of complexity and when organizations face problems without easily identifiable solutions – i.e., when reasoning fails to establish a sense of order (Boje, 1991). This is particularly salient with sustainability given that it often presents organizations with sets of multiple, often conflicting, and sometimes contradictory tensions that must be dealt with simultaneously (Devinney, 2009; Hahn et al., 2014). As such, myths may in some instances be reactive in the sense that they create simplified mental maps that act as a defense for anxiety stemming from confronting the unknown. Generally, the less that is known about a social context and the higher the perceived threat, the more extreme the myth given the need to rationalize higher levels of complexity (Bottici and Challand, 2006). This contributes to extreme myths such as climate change being an elaborate hoax by the Chinese government to undermine the US economy (Edward, 2016). Whilst less extreme, organizations also engage in this sort of mythmaking about climate change and sustainability.

This is evidenced by certain technologies such as carbon capture and storage or geoengineering being pedestaled as a climate change cure-all, despite currently being economically unviable, technologically impractical and, as with geoengineering, morally dubious (Wright and Nyberg, 2014b). Myths thus arise given the need for simplification as they divert attention from instances of overbearing complexity. As argued by Barthes (1972: 143): [myth] abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them a simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, […] it organizes a world without contradictions because it is without depth."

Relatedly, the second function of myth that is important for this study is that myth tends to conceal certain facets of social reality that threaten social order (Filby and Willmott, 1988). Indeed, myth was traditionally framed as a mechanism that obscures, and was used to explore, amongst other social phenomena, class struggles (Cassirer, 1973). However, scholars have recently moved away from myth purely as a form of ideological obfuscation, instead, regarding mythmaking as a way to provide significance to political projects (Wright and Nyberg, 2014b). Accordingly, as myths present particular narratives as 'truth', they exclude the political interests of others as less significant or even as standing at odds with dominant myths. This highlights a more proactive function of mythmaking, which may be used in the pursuit of legitimating a social order that favors those groups in power. Nyberg and Wright (2014) in particular have drawn from this perspective to illustrate how myths perpetuate a capitalist imaginary of 'rationality' and 'efficiency', which they argue "absorb and adapt the critique of corporate capitalism while enabling ever more imaginative ways of exploiting nature" (Wright and Nyberg, 2014b: 205).

Crucially, myths have certain effects as they shape identity and incite action (Brown 2005; Clegg 1989). On the one hand, mythmaking may become self-fulfilling as myth-makers begin to act according to their own narratives; as Brown (2003: 108) suggests: "[myth] encourages feelings of omnipotence and fantasies of control among significant stakeholder groups." On the other hand, the myth-consumer becomes embedded within a predetermined identity that

aligns with the interests of the myth-maker (Bottici and Challand, 2006). This highlights how myths tend to reproduce, in codified forms, relations of domination (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Clegg, 2013). In this respect, mythmaking highlights both the agency of firms as somewhat 'aware' of the often-irreconcilable tension between sustainability dimensions, and that the relationship between dimensions may be obfuscated.

In sum, mythmaking offers a potentially fruitful lens through which to conceptualize defensive responses to sustainability tensions. A mythmaking lens may also highlight a 'darker side' of avoiding sustainability tensions, which remains currently underexplored in the literature on sustainability and paradox. We therefore pose the following questions: how does mythmaking construct defensive responses that facilitate avoiding sustainability tensions? How do these defensive responses, in turn, affect corporate responses to sustainability issues such as climate change?

7.3.2. Methods

Context

This study is set in an extreme context: the controversial relationship between multinational oil and gas companies and climate change (Du and Vieira, 2012). The oil and gas industry is uniquely controversial, compared to other contested industries – such as the fur, tobacco, or gambling industries – given our dependence on fossil fuels (Bhattacharyya, 2009; Durand and Vergne, 2015). Oil and gas companies are critical actors in the global debate on climate change and have played an important role in shaping much of the business-climate change discourse (Ansari et al., 2013). These firms hold a vast resource base, particularly with regard to technology and financial power that, depending on their allocation, could be hugely beneficial with regard to tackling climate change (Levy and Kolk 2002; Stevens 2016). Furthermore, besides their own production processes—i.e., the energy needed to extract, refine, and transport oil and gas—these firms' core product *is* fossil fuels, which makes up a substantial proportion of total greenhouse gas emissions (IEA, 2016). As such, taking into account environmental disasters such as spills, oil and gas companies are often scrutinized

by a wide variety of publics and given the "classical role as the villains of climate change" (Lovell, 2010: xii). Given pressure from publics and other stakeholders such as civil society organizations and investors (MSCI, 2014; Paun et al., 2015), alongside increased regulatory changes (Peeters and Uylenburg, 2014: 181), oil and gas companies have responded to climate change; a process that has varied over time and differs amongst individual companies (Kolk and Levy, 2001). We chose to analyze the European supermajors—BP, Shell and Total—since they have publically been dealing with climate change for a longer period of time compared to the US supermajors, which have largely kept climate change separate from their core business until recently (Goldenberg, 2015; Pulver, 2007).

Data and analytic strategy

Our dataset comprises the European supermajor' CEO-speak (Amernic and Craig, 2006, 2007), which refers to a CEO's public speeches, press statements, letters to stakeholders (in both the annual and sustainability reports) and media interviews/contributions. This data is commonly utilized to analyze corporate disclosures about sustainability related issues (Beelitz and Merkl-Davies, 2011; Mäkelä and Laine, 2011; Tengblad and Ohlsson, 2009; van Halderen et al., 2016). CEOs are often seen as "the social face of the organization" and, especially in the case of fossil-fuel companies, engage publically in justifying their firms' actions in light of climate change (Brennan and Conroy, 2013: 176). A CEO's words are important and carry a certain clout. Thus, CEO-speak can be considered as texts "which leave meaningful traces" (Phillips et al., 2004: 640). As argued by Mäkelä and Laine (2011: 219), CEO-speak does not only "reflect organizational culture and values but also have broader cultural and political significance [as they] participate in the processes through which societies come to frame and understand phenomena, such as environmental challenges, sustainable development and corporate responsibility." Therefore, through CEO-speak, organizational myths are talked into being (Boje, 1995).

Our dataset covers the period from 1997-2015 as depicted in Appendix 1. We selected 1997 as a starting point given that this was the first time an oil and gas supermajor—BP in this

case—publically acknowledged the need to address climate change (Lovell, 2010). We concluded our dataset at the end of 2015 given that the Paris Agreement was signed – a monumental moment that signaled a potential shift in the fossil-fuel-climate change debate. After 2015, fossil-fuel companies have been much less explicit about climate change strategy, which largely revolves around waiting for governments to implement the Paris Agreement (Kinley, 2016). Texts were primarily selected by downloading sustainability reports and CEO speeches from the respective corporate websites and using Factiva and Google newspaper searches for media interviews and newspaper contributions. Online searches also directed us to speeches that were not listed on each company's corporate website, but were available on third-party sites or represented as extracts in media articles. Documents that were not available on corporate websites but publically available at some point in time such as previous sustainability reports were requested by sending a request to the communications departments of each of the companies. In total, we collected 192 documents (see Appendix 1).

We adopt a critical-interpretative approach to the study of mythmaking (Bowles 1989; Boyce 1996; Mumby 1987). As such, whilst our understanding of myth is largely inspired by interpretivist work on organizational symbolism (Brown, 1994; Dandridge et al., 1980; Pondy et al., 1983), which aligns with the constructivist underpinnings of most paradox research (Jarzabkowski and Lê 2015; Smith and Lewis 2011), we consider mythmaking, and the defensive responses constituted therein, as having ideological effects (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). This is particularly useful for our study given that a critical-interpretative approach emphasizes the *formative* role of myth in shaping the very context it seeks to represent (Boje et al., 2004; Fairhurst and Putnam, 2004). In other words, the way that supermajors talk about climate change creates a (mis)representation of reality that, when enacted, determines their response to climate change. Our data analysis process followed three phases.

The first phase involved a thematic analysis, which we adapted from previous work on narrative and myth in organizational studies (Ganzin et al., 2014; Hardy and Maguire, 2010;

Humphreys and Brown, 2007). Accordingly, we used qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) and engaged firstly in an open coding strategy in order to identify particular narrative structures—e.g., plot, the protagonist or hero, journey, end goal or destination, enabling/disabling forces, events, and coherent identities (Boje, 2001)—that the supermajors used to address their relationship with climate change (Strauss and Corbin, 2007). This process resulted in an array of first order codes (*keywords*), which we reorganized based on overlaps with other similar codes (e.g., *efficiency, innovation, technology*) and then grouped them into second-order themes (i.e., *the techno-fix*, *Promethean oil man* and *climate partnerships*).

During the later stages of this analysis we noticed that each myth contained distinctive contradictions and that in each instance, the supermajors were recasting these as somehow strategically beneficial. This led us to the second phase of our analysis in which we focused specifically on utterances that responded contradictory elements. During this stage, we began to oscillate between the literature on paradox defenses and the data. Through an abductive approach, we abstracted from the data to identify and categorize the most salient defensive responses within each myth.

Finally, during the third phase of analysis, we were concerned with the extent to which the supermajors' limited engagement regarding climate change was determined by the effects of mythmaking. Here, we were interested in how, by enacting defensive responses, the supermajors reproduce their dominant power position within global environmental governance. We thus identified ideological discourses that were furthered through the supermajors mythmaking, and that ensured the continuation of the status quo practice of extracting, producing, and marketing fossil fuels.

7.3.3. Findings

In this section, we illustrate three myths—techno-fix, promethean oil man, and climate partnerships—that facilitate the construction of defensive responses, which we found

functions through two main dynamics: *anchoring* and *transferring* (see Table 4). Anchoring regards the way that myths entrench responses into past understandings or practices (this mainly concerns the techno-fix and the Promethean oil man myth). Transferring occurs when focus is taken away from the source of the problem, i.e., where fossil fuels are extracted from the ground, and relocated somewhere else (mainly concerns the promethean oil man and climate partnerships myth). We illustrate these two dynamics by discussing each myth individually, highlighting also: (ii) the form of each myth; (ii) its defense mechanism; and (iii) how this defense either disregards, diverts, or displaces tension regarding the relationship between fossil fuels and climate change. We conclude this section by demonstrating how, upon enacting these defensive responses, the supermajors self-determine their own failure to substantively address climate change.

4 – Overview of main findings for Article II

	Defence	**Practice**	**Function**	**Illustrative quotes**
Techno-fix	Regression	Anchoring	Disregard tensions	In 100 years, there should be more renewables. Is it good? If we can make progress. One of the concerns is a cost. Today we all know the most economical fuel is oil" (de Margerie in Mason, 2010)
Promethean oil man	Fantasy	Anchoring; Transference	Divert tensions	"The oil and gas we're developing in deepwater Gulf of Mexico requires the same kind of technology it takes to put someone on the moon" (Hayward in Chazan, 2009)
Climate partnership	Projecting	Transference	Displace tensions	"Governments specify their energy mix through royalties, taxation levels and permitting requirements. […] Once the government decides, our responsibility is to be one of the lowest CO_2 operators for this source of energy." (van der Veer, 2006c)

The techno-fix myth

The supermajors place significant emphasis on the virtues of science, human ingenuity and technology as means to address climate change. Through the techno-fix myth, an anthropogenic tendency to manage the natural environment is amplified, often referring to the merits of engineering expertise: "[…] technology can do that for us, and we need to be in a position of demonstrating that there are answers to this tradeoff which make it possible for people to have a good lifestyle without damaging the environment" (Browne in Minnesota Public Radio, 2002). Certain technologies such as carbon capture and storage (CCS) or liquefied natural gas (LNG) are framed as all-encompassing climate change solutions, as Voser (2012d) argues: "Natural gas is affordable, clean-burning and benefits the economy. It's a natural ally to renewables like wind and solar." This vivid comparison showcases two different energy sources as friendly companions. However, such oversimplified cause-and-effect rationality merely acts as a 'silver bullet' for an otherwise complex problem.

The techno-fix myth represents nature as something to be *valued* in economic terms – i.e., putting nature on a balance sheet and accounting for the negative impacts of the oil and gas extraction, refinement and transportation process. As such, much of CEO-speak vocabulary is managerial, expressed through notions of efficiency, calculation and performance. As Total's CEO, Christophe de Margerie asserts: "In 100 years, there should be more renewables. Is it good? If we can make progress. One of the concerns is a cost. Today we all know the most economical fuel is oil" (Mason, 2010). Accordingly, climate change is not portrayed as a uniquely distinct consideration that impedes the overall strategy of the organization. Instead, controlling for the effects of climate change becomes a concern that can be effectively managed within the parameters of standard business practices such as, inter alia, cost-benefit analysis: "There are significant oil and gas resources still available but what we need to do now is focus on ways of reducing their impact and reach for the prize of clean, green fossil fuels" (van der Veer, 2005b). In this quote, Shell's CEO argues that environmental impact and operational efficiency reaches the point of creating profitable 'green' fossil fuels. Shell's

environmental concerns are made to fit with the language of managerialism and risk, and not vice versa. This reduces the threat posed by climate change by dismissing the need to radically overall economic systems or firm practices (e.g., Klein, 2014).

Defense mechanism 1 - Regression: Underpinning the techno-fix myth is the unwillingness of the supermajors to depart from established past practices, despite professing the need to change those practices to adapt to climate change in the future. Therefore, the myth facilitates a regression response by anchoring climate change action deep into past. This way, solving climate change relies on utilizing those old habits that caused climate change in the first place. For example, the supermajors often draw from past successes or notable events that are highly emotive to legitimate the continuation of fossil fuel exploration. An especially salient illustration is how historical analogies become anchor points that legitimate modern-day practices of the supermajors. Especially the case with BP, Winston Churchill is frequent used in such manner:

> *That's the challenge. So what are we doing? First, we're investing in the next generation of oil and gas resources around the world. Winston Churchill once said that security in oil came from a diversity of supply. That was right in 1915—when, incidentally, he was a shareholder in BP on behalf of the government, some 50 percent—and it is right right now* (Browne, 2005a)

In this instance, BP's John Browne is referring to the climate "challenge" being similar to a situation that Churchill, at the time serving as First Lord of the British Admiralty, faced when he proposed that the British naval fleet switch from domestic coal to imported oil. The supermajors use such historic appeals as examples of their ability to solve climate change. Other examples include, amongst others—early railway pioneers, Robert Stephenson and Isambard Kingdom Brunel (Moody-Stuart, 2000); American president Woodrow Wilson's involvement in WWI (Voser, 2009b); and oil drilling legends, Colonel Edwin Drake (Dudley, 2013c) and Wang Jinxi (Voser, 2012a). Anchoring in this case produces a strong, nostalgic

association with a past that is familiar and that can provide a sense of comfort; regressing into a well-known past that disregards the complexities of an unknown future.

Promethean oil man myth

The supermajors consider themselves noble upholders of modern civilization as they provide "the energy for the basic things of life, such as heat, light and mobility" (Hayward, 2007a). This myth overlaps in many ways with the ancient Greek myth of Prometheus – a Titan who helped humans stand upright, and who famously provided humans with fire stolen from the gods (Dryzek, 1997). Through the Promethean oil man myth, the supermajors aim to control nature by rejecting its 'wildness' and potentially destructive tendencies (Lovelock, 2010). Successfully drilling in ultra-deep water is a common narrative used to highlight this aspect of overpowering nature. In a speech at the Arab Strategy Forum in Dubai, Shell's van der Veer (2006a) explains: "[...] the industry has a good record of meeting these kind of environmental challenges. We only have to look back thirty years ago to when the conditions in the North Sea were seen by many as too hostile for successful development."

As an outcome of dominating nature, the supermajors often stress the service they provide to humanity. For instance, Total's Pouyanné (2014a), renders his company a servant of civilization given its role in "bringing energy to people." These efforts are often manifested by using ideographs, or 'god terms' that appeal to a common good and are generally considered appropriate by a wide set of audiences – e.g., rights, development, progress, growth, and prosperity (McGee, 1980). The magnitude of such claims overpowers any counter arguments that oppose the status quo. A particularly important ideograph is 'energy', which is used as a synecdoche for 'oil and gas' (Browne, 2004a):

> *Can we transcend what appears to be a harsh and unacceptable trade off between the goal of improving living standards – and on the other hand the equally imperative goal of protecting the natural environment which sustains human life? Energy is at the heart of that trade off.*

The emptiness inherent in the term 'energy', in this case, symbolically transcends the complexities associated with the trade-off between living standards and environmental protection. In other words, although trade-offs are unavoidable, as stated by John Browne, they are displaced by the prime task of securing 'energy'. What exactly 'energy' constitutes is irrelevant – what is important is only that it is secured.

Defense 2 – Fantasy. The Promethean oil man myth's defense mechanism is relying on a fantasy of omnipotence to escape the irreconcilability between their core product and climate change. In doing so, the supermajors reproduce their own indispensability as *the* answer to climate change, arguing that despite being the cause of the problem, they are concurrently the most likely solution; possessing the technological expertise and financial muscle needed to address climate change. The grandiosity of such claims is evidenced by the frequent recalling of exaggerated heroic acts, as Tony Hayward (in Chazan, 2009) recalls: "The oil and gas we're developing in deepwater Gulf of Mexico requires the same kind of technology it takes to put someone on the moon." Here, the Promethean oil man myth's role is to facilitate anchoring the defensive response. Thus, the supermajors become entrenched in their self-proclaimed role as noble upholder of modern civilization. For example, in a speech at the European Conference of Environmental and Engineering Geophysics Tony Hayward (2007a) argued: "[…] when it comes to dealing in a timely and practical manner with the great insecurities of the early 21st century, the energy industry is not just part of the solution, it is the solution."

The second way the Promethean oil man myth facilitates a fantasy response is through transferring fossil fuel demand to developing countries. As such, by reinforcing the need for fossil fuels for poverty alleviation, the supermajors shift the source of climate change to developing countries (de Margerie, 2007: 2):

> *Global energy demand is going to remain strong, because developing countries lag far behind industrialized nations. How can you justify dashing the hopes of the billion and a half people in the world who don't have electricity, or crushing the aspirations of people who want to own a car in China or India, where there's only one car per 50 or 100 inhabitants, compared with one for every two people in the West?*

Based on this quote, the European supermajors pit 'dashing the hopes of the billion and a half people' against preserving the natural environment, thereby making it seem somehow unjust to discredit the fossil fuel industry. The Promethean oil man thus operates on this fantasy of being a poverty eradicator, which, of course diverts attention away from the main issue at hand: climate change.

Climate partnerships myth

The European supermajors frequently posit that only by partnering with actors traditionally not associated directly with the oil and gas industry, can climate change be successfully addressed. For example, Total's Thierry Desmarest (2003) calls upon NGOs to help the supermajors in addressing climate change based on the idea of partnership and dialogue: "Civil society expects companies, especially the biggest ones, to manage the environmental impact of their operations and industrial risk […] That means engaging in broader dialogue with a wide array of stakeholders." As such, the supermajors embrace the idea of being held accountable by external stakeholders: "We at Shell […] must not be shy to open up to scrutiny" (Voser, 2011d). Of course, this relationship is based on voluntary reciprocity – there are no hard laws committing either party to action. A similar approach is called for with regard to governments. In this respect, the threat posed by the government is welcomed rather than shunned as state intervention should "provide the right frameworks to encourage economic investment in cleaner energy, while business can offer technology, know-how, transparency and pragmatic long-term views" (van Beurden, 2013). Governments must therefore make it commercially viable for businesses to invest in a low-carbon future, which usually either takes the form of providing subsidies for energy efficient technology

investments, or developing carbon trading platforms such as the EU emissions trading system (EU-ETS).

Defense 3 – Projecting. By underscoring the role of external organizations as necessary to address climate change, the climate partnerships myth mainly employs a projection defense mechanism. The role of mythmaking is that it facilitates transference of responsibility of addressing climate change away from the source of the problem—i.e., where fossil fuels are actually extracted from the ground to an external source. Thereby, tensions that stem from the zero-sum game between fossil fuels and climate change are displaced onto the transnational climate policy community, NGOs and national governments. Interestingly, whilst shifting responsibility to external sources, the supermajors never completely discredit the ideal of free markets. As Hayward (2007a) of BP describes: "History firmly suggests that all these problems are susceptible to action and innovation. This process can be aided or hindered by the way in which governments perform their role of policy making and the enactment of law." As highlighted in this quote, 'action and innovation' is 'aided or hindered' to the extent that they are being efficiently regulated by governments. Based on this logic, if climate change is not adequately addressed, it is not the fault of the supermajors' actions or lack thereof, but because they were not properly regulated.

The production of tar sands, which is often regarded as especially carbon intensive, vividly illustrates this projection defense mechanism. As van der Veer (2006c) explains: "Governments specify their energy mix through royalties, taxation levels and permitting requirements. […] Once the government decides, our responsibility is to be one of the lowest CO_2 operators for this source of energy." Fittingly, because responsibility in this case does not originate from within – i.e., the supermajors will not self-restrain from producing more tar sands – ecological concern is transferred away from the tar sands producer, to governments. A similar situation occurs when the harmful consequences of extracting tar sands is transferred away from the firm and placed on the ideal of "[maintaining] an open and transparent dialogue with governments, NGOs, and other critical stakeholders" (Voser,

2011e). As such, projection does not always happen directly by transferring responsibility to specific actors, but as shown the quote above, the *relationship* between actors may also acquire projected negativity.

Effects of avoiding tensions through mythmaking

As illustrated above, through mythmaking, the supermajors construct defensive responses that in various ways avoid the contradiction between being a fossil fuel company and professing concern for climate change. This has particularly important effects as, upon enacting these myths, the supermajors themselves determine how they materially respond to climate change. Two examples illustrate are used here: (a) how anchoring marginalizes certain truths; and (b) how transference reproduces positons of power.

The first example regards the effects of *anchoring* as a function of mythmaking. Here, by entrenching responses deeper into unsustainable practices the supermajors reinforce certain 'truths' which over time marginalize practices that do not conform to these 'truths'. Indeed, those subjects who identify with a marginalized practice, also become marginalized as radical (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). For example, the supermajors exhibit a near obsession with measurability—emphasized mostly through the techno-fix myth—in which addressing climate change can only be achieved with increased efficiency, better performance, and a favorable risk-benefit evaluation. Any investment that could address climate change must be proven under this rubric; opportunities that fall outside are omitted. Shell's CEO, van Beurden (in Macalister and Carrington, 2015) for instance rejects large-scale investments into carbon reducing technologies because, as indicated in the quote below, it falls outside what he considers to be practical: "Is there an opportunity or obligation to invest in a low-carbon energy future? Absolutely, but I know that whatever I am going to find as a business model or a technology that will work for me will take decades to pull off."

This makes investing in renewables particularly difficult – even if commercial rewards can be proven – because there are too many 'unknowns', for instance regarding measuring the impact of renewables, not only on environmental performance, but on other aspects of the

fossil-fuel business such as safety. Therefore, instead of finding new ways of conceptualizing the relationship with the natural environment, inaction is fostered as the supermajors become trapped in by their own fixation with measurability. Even if initiatives *do* conform to this 'ideology of numbers', such as pricing carbon through financial markets, they tend to reproduce the obsession with measurability, since carbon markets are themselves predicated on an ideology of numbers (Chelli and Gendron, 2012). In a similar vein, using preexisting accounting tools and calculation metrics to account for the risks of climate change reinforces the objectification, and ultimately reification, of nature (Mäkelä and Laine, 2011). Consequently, the natural environment is stripped of its intrinsic properties, and presented as an object to be valued, as de van der Veer (2009a) nonchalantly suggests in his key note speech at the 10th International Oil Summit in Paris: "Mother Nature put it there, and we take it out."

The second example concerns the *transference* function of myth. Here, inaction to address climate change stems from the supermajors revoking their own responsibility to act, coupled with reproducing their power position. As such, a perverse system of domination is constituted, for instance, whereby developing countries are subordinated as the supermajors "take care" of people from "resource-rich countries" who "need food, housing and all the other basic products and services" (Browne in Mahony, 2004). Indeed, quasi-neocolonial sentiment misrepresents developing countries as necessarily impoverished and somehow inferior, without basic services such as electricity and lost without the help of the supermajors. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this is common with projection defenses – blame is usually transferred from those who dominate, to their weaker subordinates (Oliver et al., 2008). By reproducing an imbalanced power dynamic, the supermajors may see no reason to invest in alternative energy, since climate change severely undermines the power position that the supermajors themselves continuously reproduce (Stevens, 2016). A similar picture unfolds when responsibility for solving climate change is transferred to external parties. There is after all little need for pursuing alternative energy sources or investing

substantially in carbon reducing technologies when responsibility to solve climate change is projected onto state actors.

Overall, a patronizing tone permeates much of the CEO-speak, especially during the Q&A part of a speech, which is usually unscripted. Frequently, the supermajors enact their power dominance by insisting that challengers "face the facts" and be "realistic," as de Margerie argues: "It will be ages before carbon-neutral energy sources overtake fossil fuels […]. Admitting that doesn't mean we're somehow irresponsible; rather, it means we're facing the facts and using them to develop actionable, real-world solutions" (de Margerie, 2007). Our interpretation of such statements is that de Margerie considers himself, and presumably his European counterparts, as somehow more knowledgeable about climate change whereas those who challenge the industry are somehow "unrealistic." Conversely, de Margerie's bravado may be considered a mask that merely represses his own insecurities regarding the complexities of climate change. Nevertheless, it is evident that, left with little choice, the supermajors have engaged extensively in organizational mythmaking. This is facilitated significantly in constructing defensive responses that obfuscate much of tension that stems from complexities associated with climate change. The effect of enacting these defensive responses is that the supermajors are increasingly unlikely to engage in any sort of substantive action that might mitigate dangerous climate change.

7.3.4. Discussion

The motivation for this study arose from the generally productive tone of corporate sustainability studies that use a paradox lens in arguing that sustainability dimensions should be embraced, even if they seem contradictory (Gao and Bansal, 2013; Hahn et al., 2014; Hahn et al., 2015). Most of this literature seemed to overlook that a "paradox approach" would be difficult to implement in industries where tradeoffs between economic and environmental concerns are unavoidable (Wright and Nyberg, 2015b). This led us to base our study on fossil fuel companies – asking ourselves what these companies do upon being confronted with what ex-BP CEO Lord Browne refers to as an "existential threat" to the oil and gas industry

(Clark, 2014). In this respect, supermajors reconstituted climate change as something that they embrace; after all, it is more difficult to discredit those organizations that seem to embrace the precise thing for which they are being discredited. Our study seeks to contribute to the literature on tensions and corporate sustainability in three ways.

First, whilst most studies on corporate sustainably tensions focus on how embracing tensions can have particularly powerful effects if properly harnessed, we detail how avoiding tensions may also have powerful effects, and a particularly unsustainable sort at that. In other words, although capitalizing on paradox can "[lead] to creative solutions to complex problems such as sustainability" (Van der Byl and Slawinski, 2015: 59), it can also have the reverse effect in terms of reinforcing an "instrumental logic" (Gao and Bansal, 2013). In the case of supermajors, this occurred as tensions between economic growth and environmental protection were obfuscated through mythmaking to appear *as if* sustainability is at the heart of the firms, without necessarily being so at all. As such, we propose that the literature on tensions within corporate sustainability seriously consider instances in which the idea of embracing contradictory sustainability dimensions is misused or even abused to reproduce the status quo.

This questions the extent to which integrative perspectives on sustainability can and should be pursued in cases where tradeoffs between sustainability dimensions are inevitable (Margolis and Walsh, 2003). Whilst an integrative sustainability perspective certainly appeals conceptually, and in certain cases also operationally, its allure as a 'transcendental' form of sustainability can be (mis)appropriated by firms. Literature focusing on sustainable development has long been concerned with the instances where firms claim to be engaging in a middle-ground perspective that somehow merges ecological and technocentric approaches (also see Egri and Pinfield, 1996; Livesey, 2002c; Milne et al., 2009). This does not neglect that there are many other cases that offer unique insights into the creative, productive and synergistic potential of a paradox approach with regard to sustainability (Hahn et al., 2015; Jay, 2013). However, there is a potential danger in not critically distinguishing between,

for instance, the way Toyota adopts a paradox approach to transcend the tension between quality-efficiency (Eisenhardt and Westcot, 1988), and how fossil-fuel companies use paradox instrumentally to distort tension between their core product and climate change. Whilst the former might have revolutionized the car business, the latter only reproduces practices that pose an imminent threat to the well-being of our planet and its inhabitants (IPCC, 2014). Therefore, our research complements this literature by proposing that "productive" may also entail a dark side; what is productive for a single firm or industry might be unproductive for other stakeholders. After all, organizations themselves cannot solve climate change or "become sustainable: individual organizations simply contribute to the large system in which sustainability may or may not be achieved" (Jennings and Zandbergen, 1995: 1023)

Our second contribution concerns, more generally, the organization studies literature on tensions, contradiction and paradox, where we extend current theory by exploring defensive responses as constructed through myth. Indeed, paradox literature suggests that defensive responses, such as those identified in this study, are only effective in the short-term as tensions inevitably resurface (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Vince and Broussine, 1996). Therefore, organization paradox scholars would arguably reject our emphasis on how mythmaking is used to avoid tensions. However, it is important to consider that mythmaking is not a *pure* avoidance strategy. After all, to reference Barthes (1972: 143): "Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification."

Whilst the supermajors' responses were certainly constructed in a defensive manner—i.e., tensions were not confronted by acknowledging and embracing the contradiction between fossil-fuels and environmental protection—they were *proactively* employed through mythmaking as a symbolic act. As such, mythmaking involves confronting paradox by actively obfuscating tensions in such a way that their anxiety provoking tendencies are rendered impotent. As per the famous war adage, "the best defense is a good offence," we

suggest that the best way to avoid tensions may, in some cases, be to actively distort them. This of course does not conform to the traditional divide between defensive and proactive responses as advocated by most paradox research. Instead, depending on the situation in which the response unfolds, coupled with the intent of the actor who constructed the response, defensive and proactive strategies potentially complement each other. Interestingly, Jarzabkowski and Lê (2015: 37) hinted toward this possibility by exploring the role of humor as a way to construct responses to paradox, illustrating how "at the micro-level, all responses are in their own way 'active' responses." Similar to our study, defensive responses were also actively constructed, yet our case differs in the sense that defensive responses merely continued to repress tensions instead of exposing them, which has especially dangerous consequences for the planet. As such, by avoiding sustainability tensions the supermajors become increasingly entrenched in a single option reality where "future becomes beholden to the past" (Smith and Lewis, 2011: 291). Indeed, the fossil fuel industry's refusal to substantively engage with sustainability tensions is considered by some to be detrimental to the industry itself (Mckibben, 2012); as evidenced by a recent Chatham House report titled, *International Oil: Companies The Death of the Old Business Model* (Stevens, 2016).

Our main argument here is that paradox can be actively constructed in such a way that it becomes as strategic resource. Notwithstanding, despite that the malleability of paradoxes is recognized (Smith and Lewis, 2011), that paradoxes are purposefully molded and even taken advantage of to reproduce a power position is discussed less. This process of what Czarniawska (1997) refers to as 'deparadoxification' places a somewhat different light on paradox since the friction on which a paradox perspective relies to incite change and organizational dynamism becomes suppressed and skewed to align with the interest of its manipulator (Reay and Hinings, 2009; Townley, 2002). We highlighted how, in the case of this context, this occurred as mythmaking was used to mask contradiction between sustainability dimensions. This is worrying because in reproducing the reliance on past

habits, mythmaking also encourages inaction on climate change. In many respects, climate change, especially from a political economy perspective, is inherently contentious, and should arguably remain so (Wittneben et al., 2012). Therefore, corporate discourses on climate change that are stripped of contentiousness are arguably less likely to provoke any sort of large-scale change. As Benson argues (1977: 8), without contradiction there is no "continuing source of tensions, conflicts, and the like which may, under some circumstances, shape […] action to change the present order."

Our third contribution underscores the use of myth as a means to examine corporate discourses on environmental issues (e.g., Wright and Nyberg, 2014). The explicit use of myth in studies of organization and management theory has lost its prominence, arguably given that myth is already incorporated into contemporary theory as its 'cultural component' – for example, amongst others, consider the way that organizations resemble 'rationalized myths' *à la* Meyer and Rowan's (1977) seminal piece on institutional theory. However, we see myths as representative of deeply ingrained socio-political ideas and practices that through their dramaturgy evoke a particularly emotional response that is difficult to capture without focusing on myth as an analytically distinct construct. Mythmaking is therefore especially useful to explore issues such as climate change; probable solutions to address large-scale environmental problems (e.g., 'de-growth' or ecological preservation) often run counter to dominant myths that have existed since the enlightenment period —e.g., human ingenuity and our superior dominance over all that is non-human.

This becomes particularly useful in the context of climate change because mythmaking provides organizations with a means to construct a narrative that, on the surface might seem to overcome tensions between economy and ecology, whilst in actuality being 'empty' – "[myth] is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a hemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence" (Barthes, 1972: 142). Indeed, by using a myth lens we avoid, on the one hand, the instrumental take on communication as a mere rhetorical tool (van Halderen et al., forthcoming), and on the other hand, communication as purely constitutive

(Christensen et al., 2013). Myth thus finds a workable middle ground between strategic and constitutive forms of communication, by considering these as mutually informative. In this case, despite producing myths surrounding climate change, the supermajors were being constituted by the myths the produced. This, in turn, as we argued, has certain effects and constrains their ability to adapt to climate change.

7.3.5. Limitations and future research

Our study has certain limitations. First, our focus on BP, Shell and Total omits other companies that due to differences in size, status, and location, might construct other sorts of myths about climate change. Indeed, we chose these companies precisely because of their celebrity status as the villains of climate change, and because of their influence on the climate debate (Lovell, 2013). There are though other fossil fuel companies that depending, for example, on their location, would construct their defensive responses differently within their corporate disclosures. For instance, a comparative study that emphasizes how US supermajors—Exxon and Chevron—compares to the European supermajors may yield interesting insights (e.g., van Halderen et al., forthcoming).

Furthermore, the type of data we analyzed—i.e., focusing on CEO-speak—poses a limitation in the sense that there are many other voices both internal and external to the organization. CEO-speak is obviously beneficial in situations where data is scarce, in our case due to the unwillingness of many oil-industry representatives to speak about climate change. Nonetheless, other data could prove very useful. For example, by adopting a more individual-level perspective and gaining access to employees that work "on the front lines," one could explore how micro defensive responses are constructed to address situational complexities related to environmental concerns. As such, whilst CEO-speak lays a foundation for understanding defensive responses on an organizational level, future work should consider the construction of paradox on operational levels.

Lastly, by basing our case on fossil fuel companies we emphasized an extreme case despite there being other cases in which tradeoffs may not inevitability occur. As such, our case might not be generalizable to other sectors. For example, low resource intensive sectors such as the financial services or certain high-tech sectors might not experience the near impossibility to adapt to climate change, depending on the extent to which their stakeholders demand they do. However, industries that are not necessarily fossil fuel based but implicated as such, e.g., air transport and livestock production, might similarly at some point also engage in the construction of defensive responses.

7.3.6. Conclusion

The aim of this article was to explore the role of organizational mythmaking as a means to avoid sustainability tensions. To address this objective, we analyzed the CEO-speak of the European supermajors and found that mythmaking constructed certain defense mechanisms—regression, fantasy, and projecting—that alleviate tension stemming from an irreconcilable relationship between their core product and preserving the natural environment. In this regard, mythmaking had two functions that were especially salient: *anchoring* and *transferring*. Whereas anchoring facilitated the supermajors regressing to the comforts of past habits, transferring shifted responsibility for addressing climate change to external actors. In enacting these myths, we illustrated how the supermajors reproduced their own inability and unwillingness to substantively address climate change. On the one hand, this is especially worrying because of the catastrophic implications of climate change if unaddressed. On the other hand, it seems inevitable that in continuing constructing and enacting myths about their relationship with climate change, BP, Shell, and Total are in effect drilling their own graves. The deeper they drill, the more difficult it is to envision alternatives and capitalize on those opportunities

7.4. Article III

Rearticulating a collapsed hegemony:
BP, climate governance, and the fantasy lock-in

This study examines how corporate inaction on climate change is determined by constructing a hegemonic discourse. Based on a longitudinal study of BP's engagement with climate change from 1990 to 2015, I focus on a two-step discursive process as theorized by Laclau and Mouffe in which a hegemonic discourse is first arranged based on a 'logic of difference', before being articulated based on a 'logic of equivalence'. In doing so, this study illustrates the practices by which BP re-constructed a collective identity around the term 'climate governance'. 'Climate governance', when enacted, reproduces corporate inaction on climate change given its dual function as an empty signifier; both fulfilling BP's omnipotent desire to control nature, whilst concurrently repressing the realization that, in fulfilling this desire, BP may be causing its own demise. This study contributes to the existing literature on corporate responses to climate change by identifying the discursive processes by which organizations become locked into their own misrepresentations of climate change.

Climate change is commonly referred to as one of the grand challenges facing humanity (George et al., 2016). It has also become of significant concern to many organizations as business environments experience profound change (Hoffman and Woody, 2013; Wright and Nyberg, 2016). Whilst some corporations have remained resistant toward climate change, historically lobbying against environmental regulation and spreading disinformation (Levy and Egan, 1998), others have been more accommodating to change (Kolk and Pinkse, 2005). Organizational 'greening' usually occurs either as corporations react to external pressures such as environmental regulation, shifting societal norms, and market demands (Hoffman and Ventresca, 1999), or as managers internal to the organization try to balance environmental and commercial concerns (Berger et al., 2011; Hahn et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2012b). Nevertheless, the pace at which many corporations incrementally take measures to mitigate against climate change seemingly pales in comparison to the radical transition required to seriously address climate change (CDP/PWC, 2013; Wright and Nyberg, 2015a). It is therefore paramount to understand why corporations persistently fail to adapt to climate change.

The literature organizations and the natural environment commonly suggests that corporate inaction on climate change is due to the way certain institutionalized aspects of modern organizations cannot appropriately incorporate the complexities posed by climate change (Slawinski et al., 2015). Alternatively, the puzzle of why organizations fail to appropriately respond to climate change has also been approached from a broader political economy perspective (Wittneben et al., 2010). In this vein, scholars suggest that corporate inaction on climate change is an outcome of how capitalism relies on the destruction of the natural environment for its own expansion (Wright and Nyberg, 2014). Thus, corporate sustainability is less about finding ways to sustain the natural environment, and more about ensuring the continuation of capitalism as a hegemonic structure (Banerjee, 2003; Tregidga et al., 2015). Here, scholars often draw from neo-Gramscian perspectives (Levy and Egan, 2003), illustrating how corporations engage in coordinated political action to defend their

privileged position as part of an alliance alongside other dominant social groups (Gramsci 1971). I join this conversation by drawing from Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) discursive interpretation of Gramsci's work; exploring corporate inaction on climate change as performing a particular *identity* constructed by corporations themselves (Contu et al., 2013; Nyberg et al., 2013; Spicer and Sewell, 2010; Tregidga et al., 2014). In doing so, I aim to illustrate what "grips" (Howarth, 2009: 310) organizational subjects to willfully pursue, and actively celebrate, a clearly contradictory approach to addressing climate change: "that the cure for the environmental ills within corporate capitalism is more corporate capitalism" (Wright and Nyberg, 2015a: 29).

To further this line of enquiry, I focus on the extreme case of BP and its relationship with climate change (Hoffman and Jennings, 2011; Rowlands, 2000). I explore BP's responses to climate change from 1997-2015 as 'articulatory practices' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:105) that aim to reconstruct a hegemonic discourse—and in doing so, an organizational identity—which collapsed during the early 1990s as a global scientific and political consensus regarding anthropogenic climate change disrupted the fossil fuels hegemony (Levy and Spicer, 2013). This article focuses on how BP re-constructed its identity by piecing together a linguistic arrangement, or 'signifying chain' (Contu et al., 2013; Dey et al., 2016). I am specifically interested in how a signifying chain is arranged over time through a process that Laclau (1990: 64) conceptualizes as 'metaphorization'. Here, one term is elevated and stands in as a totalizing representation of the entire chain; thereby, displacing differences within the chain so to produce a hegemonic discourse. This study illustrates how, over three periods, BP re-constructed a signifying chain in such a way that the term 'climate governance' was privileged and became a unifying identity. This, I argue, not only legitimates BP's inaction on climate change, but, upon enacting the 'climate governance' identity, BP becomes trapped in a 'fantasy lock-in' – satisfying BP's omnipotent desire for control over nature, whilst repressing the realization that BP may be impotent in averting dangerous climate change.

Heeding Levy and Spicer's (2013: 675) call to examine "the current climate impasse [by] exploring how [political] dynamics have played out in different settings," this study contributes to two literatures. First, it contributes to organization studies literature that draws from the concept of hegemony (Levy, 2005; Levy and Egan, 2003), highlighting the discursive processes by which a broken hegemony is reconstructed. Specifically, this study identifies the conditions under which metaphorization occurs, or how particular term is able to suture an entire chain—thus over time becoming the direct embodiment of a universality, or hegemony (Laclau, 1990; Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). Second, it contributes more generally to the literature on business-natural environment relations (Hoffman and Bansal, 2012) by conceptualizing corporate inaction climate change as an identity (Tregidga et al., 2014). Here, the study illustrates the effects of enacting this identity whereby an organization becomes trapped in a self-perpetuated fantasy lock-in, which is not only threat to organizational survival, but when applied to the fossil fuel industry, threatens the well-being of the entire Earth system.

7.4.1. Theoretical framing

Corporate (in)action regarding climate change

There are many examples of corporations substantively responding to climate change in a way that benefits both the corporation and the natural environment (Hoffman, 2005; Lash and Wellington, 2007; Lee and Klassen, 2015). Yet, on the whole, corporations are not adapting to climate change on a scale that would seriously mitigate against climate change (Wright and Nyberg, 2015a). On an organizational level, corporate inaction on climate change often occurs because dealing with the sort of complexity associated with large-scale environmental issues incurs more risks than benefits (Pulver, 2007). For instance, the commercial viability of carbon mitigation technology remains uncertain, not to mention the difficulty in accurately predicting how such technology actually impacts the Earth system (Pinkse and Kolk, 2010). Furthermore, managerial logics that determine organizational life often hinder a rapid transition toward adopting carbon-neutral business practices (Banerjee

et al., 2003). For example, Nyberg and Wright (2015: 20) highlight how, through the construction and then enactment of climate change as a corporate *risk*, organizations misrepresent the complexities of climate change as they "absorb climate change within existing business activities." In addition, managers' perceptions of time, which are largely conditioned by practices that favor short-termism, reinforce uncertainty avoidance and thus facilitate corporate inaction on climate change (Slawinski et al., 2015).

Some scholars take this a step further and posit that corporate inaction regarding climate change stems from deep-seated contradictions inherent to capitalism (Schnaiberg, 1980; Schnaiberg and Gould, 2000; York, 2004). As such, corporate responses to climate change reflect the contradictory function of capitalism itself as an "economic system that relies on the destruction of nature for its own development" (Wright and Nyberg, 2015b: 30). Based on this perspective, an ecological modernization discourse—the logic of a harmonious balance between economy and ecology as professed by mainstream Western business, policy, and civil society actors—is rejected as essentially contradictory. Indeed, as Mol and Spaargaren (2000: 272) suggest, ecological modernization is based on assumption that "the only way *out of* the ecological crisis is by going further *into* the process of modernization." Wright and Nyberg (2015a: 28) frame the contradictory tendencies of capitalism as a form of 'creative self-destruction', or the "bizarre notion that the only available response to a problem caused by the market's ever-expanding reach is to expand that reach further still." This insight can be traced to Marx's idea of a 'metabolic rift', which several scholars often use to theorize the dialectical relationship between human activity (e.g., organizations) and its impact on the natural environment (O'Connor, 1989). Thereby, for capitalism to survive, it must continuously expand itself. This poses a problem for organizations because of the critique that ensues from their very existence relying on the continuity of capitalism, which relies on environmental degradation, to do so (Böhm et al., 2012; Foster et al., 2010). Yet how have corporations, their stakeholders, national governments, and publics not only come to willfully accept, but actively embrace the contradictory function of capitalism(Jones and

Spicer, 2005: 244)? To address this question, I now turn to concept of hegemony, which is useful in this regard given that, as Howarth (2009: 310) suggests, "[hegemony] concerns the various ways in which regimes, policies, or practices grip or hold a subject fast, or fail to do so."

Based on the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, the concept of hegemony has become increasingly prevalent in management and organizational studies and often features in research regarding addresses climate change (Levy and Egan, 2003; Levy and Scully, 2007; Nyberg et al., 2013; Wittneben et al., 2010). Hegemony, as Jessop (2002: 13) indicates, "involves the successful mobilization and reproduction of the 'active consent' of dominated groups by the ruling class through the exercise of political, intellectual, and moral leadership." Applied to the context of global environmental governance, Levy and Egan (2003) use the concept of hegemony to demonstrate how corporations, as a response to potential mandatory regulation on carbon emissions in the US, engaged in a 'war of position' to fend off such threats through lobbying, and by co-opting dissidents (also see Shamir, 2005; 1997). But these studies focus mostly on how material interests are competed for strategically; i.e., through powerful actors' coordinated action aimed at maintaining a hegemonic structure (Levy and Scully, 2007; Cox, 1983). An alternative approach that avoids overemphasizing the agentic efforts of powerholders seeking to secure their material-economic interests is situated within the poststructuralist tradition. Here, inspired largely by the work of Laclau and Mouffe (2001), hegemony is constituted discursively through ongoing practices of articulation that construct a particular *identity* (Birke and Böhm, 2006; Contu, 2002; Contu et al., 2013; O'Doherty, 2015; Spicer and Sewell, 2010; van Bommel and Spicer, 2011; Willmott, 2005). In many ways, this understanding theorizes hegemony and identity building as an expressly political affair, as Torfing (1999: 82) asserts:

> *[…] hegemony is just another name for politics, but one that emphasises the construction of identity [meaning], and conceives values and beliefs as an integral part of such an identity. Within this perspective, identity is not the starting point of politics, but rather something that is constructed, maintained or transformed in and through political struggles.*

Hegemony as constituted through practices of articulation

Laclau and Mouffe (2001) radicalize Gramsci's theory of hegemony, emphasizing how meaning (*identity*) becomes temporarily 'fixed' by discursive struggles (Howarth and Stavarakakis, 2000: 14). Hence, whilst Laclau and Mouffe (2001) agree with Gramsci that hegemony is achieved not through coercion but by willful consent, they reject Gramsci's material-class determinism and instead explicitly foreground the role of language. Consent is realized when subjects ascribe to a collective identity, which is shaped or transformed by certain 'practices of articulation', defined as "any practice establishing relations among elements such that their identity is modified as a result" (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 105). In doing so, the contestability between multiple discourses is displaced by articulating these around a common reference point (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000; Willmott, 2005). For instance, as Stavrakakis (1997b) argues, the environmentalist movement has collectively been articulated around the ambiguous term 'green', which stabilizes the plethora of discourses that constitutes environmentalism – e.g., ecology, social responsibility; grassroots democracy; non-violence; decentralization; post-patriarchal relations; and spirituality (1997b: 268). Applying this perspective to the concept of corporate sustainability, hegemony functions by subsuming contradictions—e.g., unfettered economic growth vs. ecological preservation—into a collective project; as argued by Wittneben et al (2012: 1436): "the deliberate breadth and vagueness of these concepts glosses over contradictions and emphasizes a common interest in both sustainability and economic development."

Organization studies literature that draws from this perspective focuses predominantly on how certain linguistic arrangements—referred to as 'signifying chains'—are articulated so that disparate actors ascribe to a unifying identity that holds together the chain (Contu et al.,

2013; Spicer and Sewell, 2010; van Bommel and Spicer, 2011). In this article, I am particularly interested in exploring how articulating a unifying identity shapes corporate responses on climate change. There are two types of articulatory practices (Contu et al., 2013; Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 134). The first functions through a 'logic of difference', which regards expanding a signifying chain to acquire increasingly more terms into a discursive field; thereby differences amongst terms are exacerbated (Dey et al., 2016). This signifying process is however insufficient to constitute hegemony because the differences within the chain are too apparent – contradiction among terms will be visible and easily exposed (Otto and Böhm, 2006). Here, Contu et al (2013), for example, highlight how a resistance campaign against a corporate shutdown in France was articulated based on a logic of difference, stressing how this limited the success of workers' campaign because differences within the campaign were too stark – workers could not identify with a common cause. A logic of difference thus operates *metonymically* as contiguous links amongst disparate terms are meaningful only in relation to one another, thus, constructing hegemony as "fractured" (Nyberg et al., 2013) or "splintered" (Spicer and Bohm, 2007).

From a discourse theory perspective, collective identity must hold different terms together and stand in to conceal their disparities for a discourse to become hegemonic. As Laclau (2005: 70) argues : "[…] one difference, without ceasing to be a particular difference, assumes the representation of an incommensurable totality […]. This operation of taking up, by a particularity, of an incommensurable universal signification is what I have called hegemony." Hegemony is more appropriately articulated by a 'logic of equivalence' in which one term, without forgoing its particularity, unites other terms within a signifying chain and takes on a totalizing function (Laclau, 1990b: 163-165). This signifying process operates *metaphorically* as each term becomes meaningful in relation to the privileged term, which incarnates, or makes equivalent, all other terms within the chain. This way, corporations are able to 'recruit' (Jones and Spicer, 2005) or 'incorporate' (Nyberg et al., 2013) subjects by forging common interests that are presented as a 'good for everyone' type-identity (Willmott, 2005). When

this identity not only subverts the differences amongst other terms within the signifying chain, but in addition empties itself to represent nothing but a complete embodiment of the chain, it functions as 'empty signifier' (Laclau, 1996). For example, Otto and Bohm (2006: 312), in their illustration of multinational corporations' involvement in the Bolivian *Water War*s, show how the term - 'water' - became an empty signifier with a double function: "it was internally split – as it presented the two particular demands, on the one hand, while at the same time it became a universality, which represented more than the two particular demands" (also see Bommel and Spicer, 2011; Stavrakakis, 1997).

Importantly, in this article, I am interested both in how the construction of these two chains produce certain organizational subjectivities that shape corporate responses to climate change, and in the mechanisms which result in one chain (operating on a logic of difference) crystalizing into another (a chain of equivalence). This process, which Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 114) refer to as *metaphorization*, is important because only when a chain has been made equivocal does it produce a commonality capable of incarnating heterogeneous elements, and thereby concealing contradiction (Torfing, 2005: 13). Indeed, metaphorization is regarded as the fundamental operation of hegemony; for instance, as Žižek (2006: 560) suggests, metaphorization, or "the elevation of some particular content into a direct embodiment of universality, […] is inscribed into the very heart of the struggle for ideologico-political hegemony."

Since metaphorization is obviously a dynamic process that unfolds over time—it cannot be examined after hegemony is stabilized—this article focuses on climate change as a 'schizophrenic' moment of crisis when a hegemonic discourse crumbles and a scramble unfolds to rebuild signifying chains (O'Doherty; 2015; Griggs and Howarth, 2003). Laclau and Mouffe (2001) refer to these periods as 'periods of dislocation', which are defined as "an emergence of an event, or a set of events, that cannot be represented, symbolised, and in other ways domesticated by the discursive structure - which therefore is disrupted" (Torfing, 1999: 148). An element within hegemonic structure 'drops' from the chain, and becomes a 'floating

signifier', resulting in a struggle between actors seeking to claim authority over the now disarticulated element (see van Bommel and Spicer, 2011). As Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000: 20) argue: "this 'decentring' of the structure through social processes […] shatters already existing identities and literally induces an identity crisis for the subject." I focus on such a period of identity crisis. I am especially interested in how climate change dislocated the hegemony of fossil-fuels, or the hegemonic structures—material, organizational and ideological/cultural (2003: 813)—that reproduce the dominance of a fossil-fuel based energy system (Levy and Spicer, 2013).

In sum, based on this perspective, corporate responses to climate change are not considered as a reacting to market demands (Hoffman, 2005), pressures from legislators (Eberlein and Matten, 2009), or as a conforming to shifting social norms (Jennings and Hoffman, 2017), but as *practices of articulation* (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001; O'Doherty, 2015; Tregidga et al., 2015). This is particularly useful to explore corporate inaction on climate change for two main reasons. First, a discursive understanding of hegemony illustrates how a unifying identity is (re)constructed as an ongoing discursive *process over time*. The crucial point at which a corporation transforms its signifying chain from a metonymical arrangement (logical of difference), to a metaphorical arrangement (logical of equivalence) can thereby be isolated. Secondly, this approach shows how a corporation's climate change responses are shaped by their *identification* with a particular discursive arrangement. Therefore, I endeavor to illustrate how subjects are "gripped" (Howarth 2009: 310) by a hegemonic discourse as they willfully overlook contradictions inherent to a business-as-usual approaches regarding climate change. Thus, my main objective is to explore corporate inaction on climate change as an enacted identity, which manifests as a result of rearticulating a hegemonic structure.

7.4.2. Methods

The study

To address the above aim, this study is situated within a 'extreme' case: the relationship between one of the largest non-state oil and gas companies – BP (Cunningham, 2015), and

climate change. The time period I focus on starts from 1990 and continues to the end of 2015. The starting period was chosen not only because the early 1990s was when BP first engaged with climate change (Lovell, 2010), but this period marks when the climate change became an international political issue (Ansari et al., 2013; Bäckstrand, 2008). The reason for focusing on the fossil fuels industry in contrast to other less extreme organizational contexts is that such cases illuminate the tensions, contradictions, and moments of crisis that occurs when a discursive field becomes dislocated (Ihlen, 2009; Schlichting, 2013; Wright and Nyberg, 2015a). BP is considered somewhat unique amongst other oil and gas supermajors with regards to climate change given its early acceptance of climate change science, and its comparatively 'progressive' climate change strategies (Kolk and Levy, 2001; Rowlands, 2000; van den Hove et al., 2002). Notwithstanding, whilst BP has been critical in shaping the global debate on climate change, it has also faced scrutiny by a wide variety of publics, NGOs and shareholders – e.g., regarding several environmental disasters such as the Horizon Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 (Ansar et al., 2013; Lovell, 2010: xii). Thus, the case of BP with regard to climate change is ideal for exploring how a corporation rearticulates a broken identity, and how this, in turn determines its responses on climate change.

The analytical framework is centered on a Laclauian discourse analysis (Glynos and Howarth, 2007). This involves identifying terms that constitute a signifying chain, and tracing how this chain evolves over time (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002; van Bommel and Spicer, 2011). Indeed, as suggested by Birke and Böhm (2006: 308), a Laclauian discourse analysis is useful in terms of "exposing hegemonic discourses as something contingent it is suitable for a critique of the inevitability of established regimes." Therefore, the aim of this study was to analyze BP's disclosures regarding climate change and to identify three important elements: (1) various terms that collectively comprise BP's signifying chain; (2) the arrangement of these elements both before the fossil fuels hegemony was dislocated, and in terms of their arrangement during BP's attempts at metaphorization; and (3) the effects of this arrangement in shaping BP's responses to climate change. I focused specifically on

understanding the practices that were employed by BP as it sought to 're-fix' its identity, which was shattered due to climate change (Glynos et al., 2009).

Data sources and data analysis

I analyzed four sources of data. First, I engaged with BP's CEO-speak (Amernic and Craig, 2006, 2007) – i.e., a CEO's public speeches and statements, letters to stakeholders (in both the annual and sustainability reports) and media interviews/contributions. As Mäkelä and Laine (2011: 219) argue, these are 'important texts' because CEOs convey strategic intent and outlook, and are often seen as "the social face of the organization" (Brennan and Conroy, 2013: 176).

Second, I analyzed newspaper articles that addressed BP's involvement with climate change directly, or regarding other environmental issues such as BP's presence in the Artic. Newspaper articles are often considered useful for analyzing hegemonic articulation (e.g., van Bommel and Spicer, 2011) because of the media's dual function as actively shaping the character of society by giving meaning to its institutions, and by 'mirroring' discursive struggles (Bell, 1995; Carragee, 1993). I analyzed a total of 121 articles which were amassed from conducting a Factiva newspaper database search of articles which referenced BP in relation to climate change. I focused on the *Financial Times,* the *Guardian, Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* given their extensive converge of climate change over the past 25 years both from European and US perspectives, coupled with the ideological diversity of considering two left-leaning publications (Guardian and New York Times), and two more conservative papers (FT and WSJ).

Third, because data for the period before 1997 is sparse (i.e., before BP publicly began to engage with climate change), I opted for using the witness accounts of two well recognized industry experts—both immersed within the fossil fuel-climate change saga during this early period—Jeremy Leggett's (2001) *The Carbon War: Global Warming and the End of the Oil Era*, and Brayan Lovell's (2010) *Challenged by carbon: the oil industry and climate change*. As Lipartito (2013: 297) suggests, such historical accounts resemble rare 'traces of the past', and

are therefore especially useful source of data "to reconstruct the life of a firm or to reconstruct an industry's history and evolution."

Fourth, I analyzed several reports produced one of BP's adversaries, Greenpeace, that over the period of this study provided a significant critique directed at BP's attempts at constructing hegemony. The exchange between Greenpeace and BP is crucial to the study as it highlighted the dynamic interplay between a hegemonic and counter hegemonic articulation (Levy and Spicer, 2013; MacKay and Munro, 2012).

Analysis of the data entailed three stages. The first stage involved immersing myself in the data and constructing an event timeline (van de Ven and Poole, 1995). Focusing especially on the newspaper articles, I segmented the timeline into temporal brackets (Langley, 1999). Each time bracket referred to a specific period of hegemonic articulation: (period 1) BP's identity is subject to dislocation due to climate change; (period 2) BP attempts to re-build a signifying chain through a 'logic of difference'; and (period 3) BP supplants the differences within its chain (from step 2) through a 'logic of equivalence'. The second stage involved analyzing the data by using NVIVO and engaging with the CEO-speak. In this respect, for each period, I initially engaged in open coding of CEO-speak, which provided the specific arrangement, or composition, of each signifying chain. For example, by process of counting key terms in CEO-speak texts, I identified that BP's initial signifying chain, that is, before it became dislocated, was comprised of five terms—'profits'; 'progress'; 'markets'; 'government'; and 'science and technology'. I then proceeded by abstracting from the data and constructing certain commonly occurring meta-themes, which were used to then infer the presence 'nodal points', or the grand terms that hold together the chain and provide sense of collective identity (Torfing, 1999: 303). Following on from the example above, this process illustrated how BP's chain was held together by 'growth'. During the latter stages of the analysis, I began to notice that BP made multiple attempts (three in total) at metaphorization, leading me to revisit the data to understand why certain attempts were failing, and why their most recent attempt was successful.

7.4.3. Findings

In the following section, I illustrate three periods that detail the process by which BP rebuilt its identity. First, in Period 1, I show how a hegemonic discourse of fossil fuels became dislocated, which resulted in a momentary identity crisis for BP. Next, during Period 2, I illustrate BP's first attempt as re-building its identity by articulating a signifying chain based on a *logic of difference*, which was however unsuccessful. Thereafter, in Period 3, I demonstrate how BP changed its articulation strategy – this time, using a *logic of equivalence* to rebuild its identity; whereas the first two attempts during this period failed, the final attempt succeeded in displacing the difference among all terms in BP's chain. Here, the privileged term 'climate science' became an empty signifier, which, as illustrated, functions to legitimate inaction on climate change by accommodating critique.

Period 1 (circa 1990 – 1997): Climate science as a dislocatory experience.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s the fossil fuel hegemony became dislocated (see also Levy and Spicer, 2013). This process mainly stemmed from increasing scientific critique regarding the relationship between fossil fuels and human induced climate change, which could not be incorporated into BP's existing discursive arrangement. Three sources of such critique were particularity important for BP.

Critique from the scientific community – Since the first UN environment conference, held in Stockholm in 1972, the credibility of climate change research increasing became recognized by the international scientific community, spilling over to the political community at the turn of the century. A pivotal point was the founding of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), that shortly after its establishment in 1989, released its *First Assessment Report* (IPCC, 1990), which established an authority on climate science. The report concluded that global temperatures had risen by 0.3-0.6^{o}C over the last century and that human activity contributed to this increase. Political actors also began to take notice as, for instance, highlighted by Margaret Thatcher (1989) in a much-celebrated speech to the UN: "It is mankind and his activities that are changing the environment of our planet in damaging

and dangerous ways. […] The evidence is there. The damage is being done." Thatcher—herself a Fellow at the Royal Society and graduate of chemistry at Oxford—would go on to speak emphatically about the science of climate change, notably, in 1988 at the Royal Society, and at the 2nd World Climate Conference in 1990 (Bell, 2013).

At this point, however, scientific critique had not yet permeated within BP. For example, in his self-reflection at the epicenter of the oil industry during this early period, Jeremy Leggett (2001) recalls a confrontation with then Chief Geologist at BP, David Jenkins in 1991 at an industry dinner party. According to Leggett (2001: 61), Jenkins seemed perplexed by the basic arithmetic behind the relationship between the amount of "carbon in the atmosphere and in the fossil fuels left below ground," naïvely asking Leggett, "[…] are you sure about these figures?" Notwithstanding, this scientific critique would set a foundation, as, somewhat ironically, BP's David Jenkins, only a few of years later, led the scientific critique from within BP (discussed below).

Critique from a new foe – Scientific critique was also key for civil society organizations and NGOs. For instance, Lord Melchett (in Poole, 1996), executive director of Greenpeace UK, wrote to prime minister, John Major, requesting to halt oil production in Scotland's Shetlands: "[…] relatively simple calculations show that the world's atmosphere cannot sustain the use of more than a few per cent of known fossil fuel reserves." Whilst the prime minister rejected the request by insisting that West of Shetland "is being opened up for exploration in an environmentally sensitive manner" (John Major in Schoon, 1996), David Bennett of the IPCC commented on the Greenpeace advance, stating that: "it is certainly true [as Greenpeace claims] that you cannot burn the world's proven reserves of oil without the world warming" (Maddox, 1993).

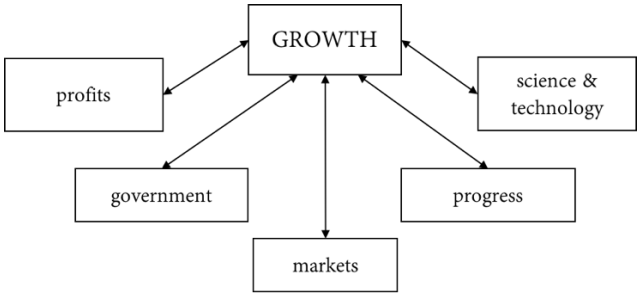
Critique from within – Whilst the above sources of external critique were certainly important in dislocating the hegemony of fossil fuels, an influential group of geological experts within the industry itself were cataclysmic in causing an identity crisis amongst European supermajors (Lovell, 2010). The exclusive Geological Society—which still today hosts their

annual black-tie dinner at London's Athenaeum—often acted as a platform for geologists, many of whom were BP employees, to discuss the science behind climate change (Geological Society, 2012). These trained natural scientists, most holding PhDs in their respective subject, hinted toward the surmounting academic work regarding climate change and the threat posed, not only to the natural environment, but to the oil and gas industry itself. For instance, in an unprecedented internal memorandum succinctly titled, *Climate Change*, sent to all members of the BP executive board in January 1997, David Jenkins, BP's Chief Geologist, distilled his scientific thoughts on the warming climate, and concluded by reflecting on implications for the industry (Lovell, 2010: 42):

> *[…] whilst a warming world continues to be a political concern, the hydrocarbon industry should be prepared to respond in a constructive manner […]. This will certainly be needed, regardless of future trends in CO_2 emissions and hence is the social responsible path along which to direct effort and investment. The likely outcome will be a compromise, but at least we'd be having the discussions in a full carbon cycle context, rather than focusing on emissions.*

Overall, it is evident that BP had entered a period in which the taken-for-grantedness of a fossil fuels hegemony was increasingly questioned - the scientific evidence behind climate change, which was even championed from within BP, coupled with increasing political agreement and pressure from civil society organization, became too difficult to overlook. BP's signifying chain (see Figure 9) in which 'profits', 'government', 'markets', 'progress', and 'science and technology', were indistinguishable from one another—their relationship unified by 'growth' as a collective identity—no longer provided a sense of closure. During the next two decades, BP engaged in several attempts to suture this now fractured fossil fuel hegemony.

Figure 9 – BP's signifying chain before dislocation



Period 2 – Rebuilding a metonymic chain (1997 – 2002)

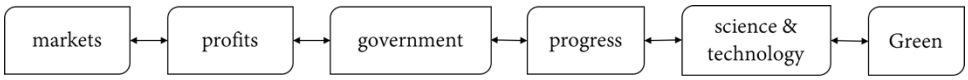
Re-articulation began during the mid-late 1990s and continued into the early 2000s, marked by two important events: (1) BP breaking ranks within the oil and gas industry by publically recognizing climate change as a scientific reality, including that climate change was a threat to the fossil fuel industry; and (2) the rebranding of BP as 'Beyond Petroleum'. With regards to the former, BP's CEO, John Browne (1997) in his famous 'Stanford speech', remarked:

> *The time to consider the policy dimensions of climate change is not when the link between greenhouse gases and climate change is conclusively proven … but when the possibility cannot be discounted and is taken seriously by the society of which we are part. We in BP have reached that point.*

From Browne's speech, I deduce the presence of five elements within the signifying chain. The first four – 'profits'; 'government'; 'markets'; 'progress'; and 'science and technology' – existed before the dislocation (See Figure 10). BP's signifying chain would be extended to incorporate two new elements: 'climate science' and 'ecology'. The first, climate science, was incorporated relatively effortlessly by BP, which already established a strong emphasis on 'science and technology', a well-established cornerstone within the oil and gas industry. All that needed to occur was to acknowledge that the science behind climate change was accurate, and to distance the company from climate science denialists such as the Global Climate Coalition (Leggett, 2001). However, the latter term 'ecology' posed a particular issue in terms of credibility; rebranding BP as an environmentally concerned company would cost $200 million (Macalister, 2015). This involved BP engaging in an extensive rebranding

campaign—a move accommodated by a new logo represented by *Helios*, the Greek titan who personified the Sun—or in the words of BP: "a vibrant sunburst of green, white, and yellow" (Lean and Anderson, 2000). The result (see Figure 10), was that 'ecology' was re-framed as 'Green'.

Figure 10 – BP's signifying chain based on a 'logic of difference'



BP's chain was being arranged metonymically so that each element gained meaning through its relation to other elements within the chain. For example, by proposing "a direct link between business success and environmental progress" (Browne in Hunter et al., 2009) BP separated 'Green' from 'profit' whilst concurrently emphasizing the contiguity between the two terms – i.e., that 'profit' and 'Green' rest side by side and work together. In this respect, the links between each term within the chain complement each other by being different to one another. Importantly, it was never BP's intent for 'Green' to become the privileged term that transcends the entire chain, rather, 'Green' gives meaning to other terms within the chain through their association with one another. This is also evidenced by an ad accompanying the BP's rebranding campaign: "[is] it possible to drive a car and still have a clean environment […] Can solar power become mainstream? Can business go further and be a force for good […] We think so" (BBC, 2000). As indicated, 'car' is co-constituted by 'clean environment'; similarly, 'mainstream' and 'solar' are constitute each other, and so on. By creating linkages between terms, BP attempted to co-opt an environmentalist discourse. Arguably, this represented what Gramsci referred to as *trasformismo*, which "consists of efforts to expand the systems of difference defining a dominant bloc" (2000: 220). BP did not resist environmentalism, but rather embraced its critique, thereby 'defanging' its radical tenets (Stavrakakis, 1997b). Moreover, by expanding the number of terms in its chain, BP was able temporarily mask contradiction; thus, co-opting 'climate science' and 'ecology' into the signifying chain resulted in an abstract, complex and sometimes confused, identity.

But shortly after the rebranding efforts commenced, cracks began to materialize in BP's new chain as the supermajor started to materially fall back on its promises. This exposed a contradiction between BP's purpose as an oil and gas company, and its efforts to address climate change. For instance, BP was not able to deliver on its intent to sustain a commercially viable alternative energy program (Frey, 2002). Accordingly, although BP successfully addressed the 'scientific critique' of the 1990s by conceding to the relationship between their core product and climate change, a new 'action critique' emerged as a Greenpeace (2003) activist remarked:

> *A few years ago, BP spent about US$200 million to rebrand the company as beyond petroleum - to convince us that the company was going green, investing in renewable energy, and cared about climate change. But this rebranding did little for their green image; they are after all an oil company.*

BP's continued exploration activities in the Artic regions increased this action critique. Certain areas, such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge became known as the 'frontiers of climate change', or "the No. 1 environmental battle of the decade" (Gerth, 2005). BP's activities in the Arctic resulted in several highly publicized scandals, legal disputes, shareholder resolutions. BP quickly responded by changing its strategy, which up to this point emphasized creating metonymical links. In response to its increasing precarious chain where contradiction was becoming discernable, BP engaged in several metaphorization attempts; the first was to prioritize 'progress' as a potential unifying term.

Period 3 – BP's attempts at metaphorization

First attempt at metaphorization - 'progress' (2002 – 2008)

In the early 2000s, BP began insisting that they are somehow indispensable to modern civilization. In doing so, BP elevated 'progress' to encompass everything they do – all terms within their chain received new meaning by revolving around 'progress'. This is exemplified in a speech by John Browne (2004a) at the Princeton Environmental Institute entitled: *Powers and Responsibilities - the Role of Corporations in Human Progress*:

> *Can we transcend what appears to be a harsh and unacceptable tradeoff between the goal of improving living standards – and on the other hand the equally imperative goal of protecting the natural environment which sustains human life?*
>
> *Energy is at the heart of that trade off. Energy has given us light and heat. Of course, not everyone enjoys all the benefits of energy. Many many millions of people still lack the heat, light and mobility we take for granted. For their sake we need to sustain the process of economic development and human progress.*
>
> *[…] Business is one of the most creative and progressive elements in society – providing the means and the choices which make human progress possible. They are honourable activities and that's why I believe business at its best is an honourable and noble activity.*

In the quote above, BP is positioned as the champion of human progress. Images of *provider* and *protector* are invoked to metaphorically represent an honorable Father. Fulfilling his traditional male role as hunter, the Father provides for his family by going to great lengths and danger—e.g., ultra-deep water and the Arctic—to conquer and bring back the means by which to sustain modern life: 'energy'. By affording us 'energy', which is used as a synecdoche for oil and gas, he protects us from an inhospitable, wild nature, thereby securing heat for warmth and light to see.

The term 'progress', however, failed to subvert all differences within the signifying chain because it re-exposed certain contradictions regarding the virtues of fossil fuel based growth. This was particularly evident as climate change, which was traditionally seen as an ecological issue, increasingly became associated with poverty during the mid-2000s (OECD, 2003). A turning point was in 2005 during the G8 Summit in Scotland, which focused, under the direction of Tony Blair, on two central themes: African aid and climate change (Tempest, 2005). Whilst these two themes were not necessarily intended to be considered together, numerous civil society organizations and representatives of developing countries were adamant that poverty and climate change *should* be considered together (Guardian, 2005); frequently citing the IPCC's (2001) depiction of Africa as: "the continent most vulnerable to

the impacts of projected change because widespread poverty limits adaptation capabilities." In this vein, several prominent NGOs—led by the New Economics Foundation and Greenpeace—collectively released a report entitled *Cast adrift: How the rich are leaving the poor to sink in a warming world* (NEF, 2004), which opens with a forward from Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "The world's wealthiest countries have emitted more than their fair share of greenhouse gases. Resultant floods, droughts and other climate change impacts continue to fall disproportionately on the world's poorest people and countries […]." As such, somewhat ironically, the Father of Progress' claims of the injustices related to denying developing countries cheap energy for economic growth backfired – it was in fact fossil fuels that was causing the injustice, and not the other way around.

Second attempt at metaphorization - 'markets' (2007 - 2012)

During its second metaphorization attempt, BP returned to what it understood best – markets. Its new CEO, Tony Hayward, made it his mission to get BP 'back to basics'. Amongst other actions, in his first week he discontinued BPs longstanding access to a London limousine service and replaced the modern art that hung on the walls BP's head offices with "prosaic photographs of BP service stations, platforms and pipelines" (Lyall, 2010). In a speech to Stanford Graduate School of Business, Hayward (Hayward in Lyall, 2010) remarked:

> *BP makes its money by someone somewhere every day putting on boots, coveralls, a hard hat and glasses and going out and turning valves […]. And we had somehow lost track of that. We had too many people working to save the world, we sort of lost track of the fact that our primary purpose in life is to create value for our shareholders. How you do that, you need to take care of the world, but our primary purpose was not to save the world. This is the end of chapter one of getting BP back on the rails.*

Clearly, times were changing – as Hayward insists, 'working to save the world' had distracted BP away from its core purpose 'to create value for our shareholders'. This seemed timely given that BP experienced several large-scale industrial disasters, including: the Texas City Refinery explosion (2005) which resulted in the death of 15 workers (see Browne, 2006); a

major pipeline leak at its Alaskan operations in Prudhoe Bay (see Hayward, 2007b); and the Deepwater Horizon accident (2010) in the Gulf of Mexico in which 11 people died, not to mention the significant environmental damage caused by the spill (see Hayward, 2010c). These incidents raised particular concerns not only around BP's environmental credentials, but its approach to safety (Lustgarten, 2010). In addition, BP was increasingly constrained financially as global energy markets became volatile.

In 2009 the oil price dropped from $150 to $35 – largely due to the global financial crisis at the time (IEA, 2009). Demand for oil fell by 2 million barrels per day (BP, 2009). Moreover, the US experienced a shale gas revolution that resulted in an oversupply of natural gas, which, in turn, further reduced demand for BP's oil products (Stevens, 2016); as such, BP decided to cut 5000 jobs and engage in a $3bn cost-saving program (Crooks, 2008). Its Alternative Energy Division also 'returned home' to BP's headquarters, its budget cut from $1.4bn to $500m (Macalister, 2009b). Vivian Cox, who led the Alternative Energy Division since its inception in 2004, resigned, stating that: "It was now right to look at the array of options before us, and to step back and say 'What can make commercial returns? What could be material to BP? And, frankly, what would have some synergies with the existing business?'" (Teather, 2009). BP stopped treating alternatives as 'alternative' but rather just another investment. This was particularly evident with its solar energy business, which was significantly downsized given its lack of competitiveness compared to other fuels – including renewables such as biofuels (Macalister, 2011). In doing so, it was able to maintain its 'Beyond Petroleum' credo by redefining alternatives simply as another link in a chain "that embraces oil, gas, coal and renewables, producing and using them all with innovation and efficiency" (Hayward, 2010e). BP thus attempted to unify its chain under the 'markets' privileged signifier. Yet again, as with the previous period, BP's efforts produced a new critique that would significantly undermine BP's emphasis on markets alone.

Each year, three reports are published that occupy 'bible' status in the energy business: BP's *Energy Outlook*, the *Annual Energy Outlook* by the US Energy Information Administration

(EIA) and the International Energy Agency's (IEA) *World Energy Outlook*. In 2012, the IEA's *Outlook* report warned: "No more than one-third of proven reserves of fossil fuel can be consumed prior to 2050 if the world is to achieve the 2°C goal" (2012: 25). This coincided with a financial think-tank, Carbon Tracker (2012: 4), conducting research into the risk associated with investing in fossil fuel companies; their study suggested "[…] that there are more fossil fuels listed on the world's capital markets than we can afford to burn if we are to prevent dangerous climate change." Several investment banks published similar findings; HSBC for instance concluded that that 25% of BPs oil reserves would become 'stranded' (Spedding et al., 2013). In response, several institutional investor groups inquired about how BP assesses financial risk related to climate change, including their plans for managing them (Monbiot, 2010). Finally, BP, with a statement hidden in the appendix of its *Energy Outlook* (2013), conceded: "We assume continued tightening in policies to address climate change, yet emissions remain well above the required path to stabilise the concentration of greenhouse gases at the level recommended by scientists (450 ppm)" (in Kurt, 2013).

The significance of this statement cannot be underestimated – based on BP's own 'most likely' scenario, the world is heading toward an increase of 450 ppm, which, when cross-referenced with IPCC data (2014), would result in a global temperature increase of 4°C. This, according to the World Bank (2012: xiv) is dangerous: "A 4°C world would be one of unprecedented heat waves, severe drought, and major floods in many regions, with serious impacts on ecosystems and associated services. […] The projected 4°C warming simply must not be allowed to occur." The irony here lays in that BP was largely responsible for inciting this critique – by prioritizing 'markets', the financial industry became alarmed; investors were concerned that, by not incorporating climate risks into their decision making, they could be in breach of their fiduciary duty. As such, despite 'market' being a potentially unifying term, it exposed further irreconcilabilities with regard to BP's purpose as an oil and gas company vis-à-vis climate change. BP was exhausting the terms within its chain. With few options left, BP turned to a long-standing companion: the state.

Third attempt at metaphorization – 'climate governance' (2010 - 2015)

BP's third attempt at metaphorization involved concurrently prioritizing 'governments' and fusing this with 'market'. Together, 'climate governance' became *the* signifier that subverts all differences amongst other elements, which now all receive meaning by their association with 'climate governance' (see Figure 11). Of course, BP already shared a special relationship with markets, as described above. Now, its familiarity with markets was combined with another familiarity – the state. Its 'special' relationship with the state is well evidenced. BP was, for example, saved from financial ruin by the British government as Churchill, in 1914, bought a majority stake in BP and switched the British Navy to use only BP's fuel (Meyer and Blair Brysac, 2010). Even after being privatized by Margret Thatcher in 1979, the British government did not abandon BP and continues to grant BP significant subsidies (Lawrence and Davies, 2015). Other governments also share a special relationship with BP. For example, the US government cleaned up BP's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and still does so today, six years after the spill (Crooks, 2016). The Russians, despite having a somewhat rockier relationship with BP, helped BP when it lost almost half its value on the stock market due to the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, as Putin remarked with reference to BP: "One man who's been beaten is worth two who haven't" (Bowers, 2015). Russia granted BP access to the Russian Arctic through its partnership with Russia's biggest oil company, Rosneft. In this period, facing the threat posed by climate change, BP again turned to the state for help, as BP's CEO, Hayward (2010b) declared during his speech at the 30th Oil and Money Conference:

> *You're probably wondering why a businessman is standing here suggesting greater government intervention - and please don't misunderstand me! I'm a great believer in free markets but the scale and complexity of this particular challenge is different from the usual workings of a market economy*

However, in doing so BP can shirk its responsibility for addressing climate change. For instance, as expressed by BP's chief economist Spencer Dale: "It is not for us to lead, it is for

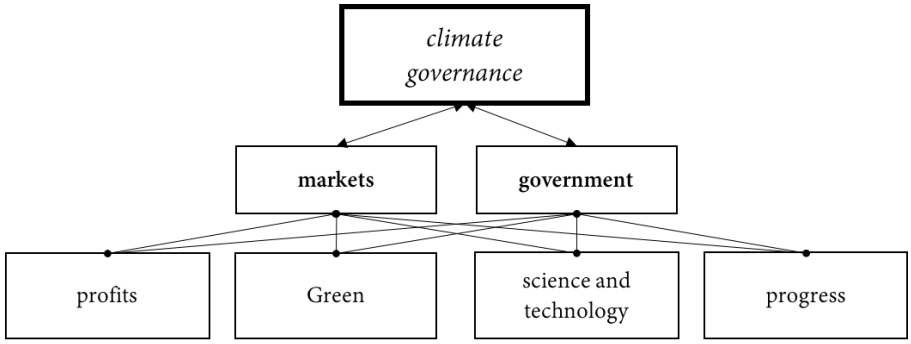
us to do our job and respond to the incentives and structures provided by policymakers" (in Darby, 2015). Using 'governments' and 'markets' in this way became particularly pronounced during the years in the buildup to the Paris climate talks. Bob Dudley, directly before the conference, teamed up with five other European oil and gas companies (Shell, Total, Statoil, Eni and BG) to write a letter addressed to France's Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius and Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), requesting for a price on carbon (either through a carbon tax or a cap-and-trade scheme) (Elliott, 2015a):

> *The most likely path for carbon emissions, despite current government policies and intentions, does not appear sustainable. The projections highlight the scale of the challenge facing policy makers at this year's UN-led discussions in Paris. No single change or policy is likely to be sufficient on its own.*

With the international political community's backing, BP became increasingly reflexive about the irreconcilability of being an oil and gas company and dealing with climate change. For example, BP dedicated a section in their *Sustainability Review* (see Dudley, 2013d) to reflect on the notion of a potential carbon bubble: "We agree that burning all known reserves would probably cause global temperatures to rise by more than 2°C." In 2015, BP also accepted a shareholder resolution that, amongst others, requires BP to 'stress-test' its business against various climate scenarios, including one that is under the 2°C mark (Kavanagh, 2015). As 'climate governance' increasingly began to stand in to represent BP's relationship with the natural environment, so too does it begin to occupy the role of master-signifier (discussed below). Accordingly, 'climate governance' is able to accommodate critique from all possible sources as it comes define elements within BP's chain; acting as the *point de capiton*, or point that quilts together previously disperse elements (Swyngedouw, 2011b). As highlighted in Figure 11, the term 'climate governance' is capable of concurrently straddling 'government' and 'market', within which BP has incorporated 'profits'; 'Green'; 'science and technology'; and 'progress'. These terms' meanings are modified around the

privileged signifier 'climate governance'. Critique waged against *particular* terms within BP's chain therefore are always in reference to the privileged signifier 'climate governance'. Indeed, since stakeholders themselves ascribe to variants of this identity, their resistance becomes counter-productive.

Figure 11 - BP's signifying chain based on a 'logic of equivalence'



7.4.4. Discussion

Whilst the perils of climate change might seem distant for most of society (Giddens, 2013), for those within the fossil fuels industry, climate change poses an immediate concern. This is exemplified by, amongst others, ex-BP CEO Lord Browne, and the patron of ecological modernization himself, Lord Stern, both referring to climate change as an 'existential threat' to the oil and gas industry (Clark, 2014). Consequentially, as I have argued, climate change dislocated previously stable discursive structures, resulting in a momentary identity crisis for BP. The growth-at-all-expenses logic that once reigned supreme, and that gave BP a sense of wholeness, ceased as a unifying identity given the advent of climate change. As emphasized above, BP engaged extensively with the process of re-building an identity, as evidenced for instance in terms of using financial resources to re-brand itself. BP commenced with rearticulation in 1997, first by building a signifying chain based on a logic of difference, followed by several attempts at supplanting differences in its chain based on a logic of equivalence. The victor term—'climate governance'—is elevated to the position of empty

signifier; quilting together the heterogeneous, and even contradictory, set of contiguous terms with BP's new chain to form a unifying identity.

'Climate governance' as an empty signifier, and the fantasy lock-in

As an empty signifier, 'climate governance' provides the illusion of unity, or accordingly Laclau (1995: 171) it names the "absent fullness" that makes equivocal the differences within BP's chain. Something must avoid that meaning 'slides' among terms within BP's chain, which was particularly necessary given its precarious arrangement—e.g., between terms such as 'green' and 'profits'. 'Climate governance' does so by emptying itself of meaning, whilst simultaneously being able to temporarily 'fix' BP's chain. As such, 'climate governance' comes to represent a collective identity that holds together each element and promises that a sense of order, only possible because 'climate governance' is, on its own, devoid of meaning (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). The term 'governance' is important because climate change is in fact 'ungoverned'. No entity can lay claim to climate change within global environmental governance or take sole responsibility for its mitigation; climate change transgresses national boundaries and is defined by complexity – it is thus largely ungovernable (Okereke et al., 2009). Of course, there are climate governing bodies such as the UN and affiliated institutions, none of which however make absolute decisions surrounding the Earth system. If climate change were indeed 'governable', there would be no need for 'climate governance', since it would already be attained. 'Governance' presents itself as the solution to climate change, despite temporarily filling a lack (Morton et al., 2011; Swyngedouw, 2011b). This has certain implications that are arguably beneficial for BP, at least in the short term.

In particular, any critique waged against BP can be accommodated, without exception. For example, environmental NGOs such as Greenpeace are entrenched in climate governance on an international level – thus, their critique of BP would simply be avoided by BP claiming to have surrendered to the same global governance regime as environmental NGOs (Meckling, 2011). Accordingly, any critique waged at BP is therefore subsumed by 'climate governance',

which implicitly adheres to market-based logics, again something environmental NGOs have come to accept. Similarly, critique launched by investors could again be accommodated because, as espoused by 'climate governance', BP is committed to stress-testing its business model against climate risks, in line with the international political community's agreed upon 2°C limit. This way, 'climate governance' relieves all elements within BP's chain from responsibility to address climate change; responsibility is instead directed toward the international political community, comprised of an enormous array of actors, state and non-state, from a wide variety of national backgrounds, each with their own interests and cultural differences. The 'common enemy' becomes everyone, and no one, including BP themselves, but never BP alone. This of course raises the question as to why 'climate governance' is able to adopt function as empty-signifier, and the implications therein.

I argue that BP's identification with the empty signifier 'climate governance' results in a *fantasy lock-in* – satisfying BP's omnipotent desire for control over nature, whilst repressing that, in fulfilling its omnipotent desire, it may be causing its own demise. In this respect, drawing from Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, fantasy is the primary defense mechanism that reduces anxiety stemming from "the traumatic failure to extinguish the lack created by the loss of lack" (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2004: 210). For BP, identifying with this promise of an impossible fullness helps prevent it from having to relinquish its perceived mastery over nature. After all, gentrifying nature is something BP strongly identifies with, whether drilling in the in the Arctic or ultra-deep waters of the Mexican Gulf. 'Climate governance' provides this possibility because, by surrendering to the international political community—which refuses to place strict bans on BPs operations and continues providing BP with subsidies (Bast et al., 2015)—BP is granted freedom to continue its exploration activities. Perversely, this is similar to how a drug addict might be encouraged to continue an addiction; resulting in the often reference to 'oil addiction' (Healy, 2010). Indeed, as Stavrakakis (2008: 1049) argues, "hegemony […] has to be supported by a fantasy scenario investing it with some supreme value at the level of enjoyment."

However, a paradox unfolds: the more BP indulges in continuing business-as-usual practice of producing and selling fossil fuel products, the greater the need to repress an anxiety that stems from the fact that BP might be contributing to the demise of its own business. Omnipotence and impotence are mutually constitutive, resulting in a 'vicious cycle' (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Vince and Broussine, 1996). Thus, BP becomes locked into fantasy. Indeed, "traversing the fantasy" seems impossible, since according to Hoedemaekers (2008: 167–168):

> *This means taking responsibility for the totality of unconscious forces that determine one's being, traversing the fantasy of a mastery of the self. Traversing this fantasy means that one acknowledges the impossibility of freedom and rationality as they are implied within neoliberal ideology.*

In other words, BP is engaging in a sort of death drive (Bradshaw and Zwick, 2016). However, 'climate governance' is not so much a drive per se, but, as Žižek (2009: 62) argues "a name for the 'undead' eternal life itself, for the horrible fate of being caught in the endless repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain." BP's realization of an inevitable demise is, in the Lacanian sense, a confrontation with the Real of nature – or, a nature which evades all symbolization or representation, neither as ecological modernization discourse, deep-ecology, or as climate science. Therefore, whilst 'climate governance' bolsters BP's omnipotence, it likewise represses the anxiety-provoking effects of BP's impotence regarding climate change mitigation. Fantasy thus functions to domesticate an impeding trauma (Stavrakakis, 2008). Of course, despite repressing this anxiety, BP holds itself back from new "becomings" since, as a fantasy, 'climate governance', merely acts as a veil that stops BP from confronting the realities of climate change. This might be an unsettling prospect in which BP's newly built chain is unraveled, yet again, exposing BP as not-master over nature, and therefore jeopardizing its own future. Indeed, being trapped this way produces a dysfunctional externalization of fantasy objects (Fotaki, 2010), which may be detrimental for organizational survival (De Vries and Miller, 1986; Kersten, 2007; Sievers, 1999; Stein, 2011).

Rearticulating corporate responses to climate change?

This study builds on the observation of Wright and Nyberg (2016) that corporations, by engaging with climate change issues, tend to reconfigure the natural environment as business-as-usual. Indeed, as Wright and Nyberg (2016: 9) argue, this involves: "firms incorporating environmental critique from NGOs, the media and employees within voluntary business activities which distract from the revolutionary changes actually required to address serious systemic environmental challenges." Whilst I agree in many respects with these insights, I likewise propose that corporate responses to climate change involve not only defining the business-natural environment relationship, but reconfiguring the relationship between governance, business, and nature. In doing so, nature becomes less defined by the virtues of the market, but rather by the virtues of government, or more accurately global environmental governance. However, herein lays a problem; corporations are not referring to sovereign states (e.g., the UK government), but to post-state constellations such as the UN, its affiliated bodies, and the plethora of other institutions that constitute global environmental governance (Andonova et al., 2009).

Indeed, BP's privileging of the 'market' failed given the strong backlash that quickly surfaced from financial investors in terms of risk. 'Market' needed to envelop a much larger discursive space – not only in that it had to satisfy civil society actors but increasingly financial investors who reject an emphasis on markets alone because of potential future climate policy developments (Ansar et al., 2013). As highlighted, with few options left, climate change ceased as a market failure alone (Stern, 2007), rather becoming a global governance issue. Whilst BP might seem to be 'throwing in the towel', the global environmental governance regime themselves make decisions that are usually pro-business; as Bäckstrand (2008: 79) argues, climate governance is "premised on neoliberal hegemonic values of the market place, manifested by the Kyoto flexibility mechanisms, carbon trading, the global carbon market and the rise of public-private partnerships."

This is a crucial development in the ways organizations engage with climate change, or rather how they engage with climate change by lingering in the shadow of global environmental governance. I use this metaphor intentionally to indicate that although fossil fuel companies such as BP might at some point have spoken enthusiastically about their intentions to adapt to climate change, global environmental governance offers solace to non-state actors wishing to suppress hard law (Andonova et al., 2009). After all, supranational bodies such as the UN do not make law: there is no international climate law. Instead, states must translate this into national law. This accounts for the ever-expanding corporate presence at large transnational fora such as the UN Earth Summits, where corporations wield an increasingly strong influence (Ferns and Amaeshi, 2017; Sprignett, 2013). Notwithstanding, with few exceptions (Wittneben et al., 2012), the current literature on climate change emphasizes largely how corporations engage with climate change directly, neglecting that often corporations do not wait for market signals, but only *substantively* act depending on that which is enforced by the state (Levy, 2005).

This also provides a different understanding of corporate inaction on climate change – as not necessarily due to organizations' inability to overcome the complexities surrounding climate change but because of being embedded within global environmental governance, which itself suffers as a "regime complex" (Keohane and Victor, 2011). As discussed in the literature review, current literature that addresses corporate inaction on climate change often proposes that corporate efforts to mitigate climate change are stymied by both market and institutional forces (Hoffman and Bansal, 2012). Taken a step further, scholars also hint toward the inherent contradiction between economy and ecology (Banerjee, 2003; Wright and Nyberg, 2015a). Whilst these factors certainly play an important role, I suggest that scholars not only bring the state back in (e.g., Matten and Moon, 2008), but also global environmental governance (Pinkse and Kolk, 2012).

Indeed, this line of thinking is well recognized within the governance literature where scholars long expressed serious concern with the erosion of traditional state actors within

global environmental governance (Djelic and Quack, 2012; Levy, 2005). More importantly, that corporations utilize the highly fragmented mosaic of global environmental governance to distract stakeholders from corporations' actual deficiencies is certainly worrisome (Okereke et al., 2009). Here corporations are championing state despite global governance being largely defined by non-state actors, hence the shift from 'government' to 'governance' (Vogel, 2008).

7.4.5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was explore how articulating a unifying identity shapes corporate responses on climate change. I thereby sought to build on critical studies regarding corporate responses to climate change (Wright and Nyberg, 2015a), and, more generally, on organization studies literature concerned with hegemony (Contu et al., 2013; van Bommel and Spicer, 2011). I was specifically interested in how corporations rebuilt a collapsed hegemonic discourse after its dislocation. To do so, I drew from the case of BP and its longstanding engagement with the natural environment; focusing on BP's attempts at rebuilding an identity that would provide a sense of unity.

The findings suggest BP rearticulated its identity in two phases, first co-opting two new elements into is discursive arrangement by following a logic of difference, and then engaging in multiple attempts at metaphorization which were based on a logic of equivalence. In doing so, BP rebuilt its identity around 'climate governance', which, in turn, became an empty signifier. I argue that this process of identification constituted a 'fantasy lock in', which goes some way to explaining corporate inaction on climate change. By enacting its unifying identity and thereby perpetuating the 'fantasy lock in', BP increasingly failed to consider alternatives to its current business model. Indeed, as emphasized, it is particularly worrying that BP was able to do so by hiding the shadows of global environmental governance. Thereby, BP's new signifying chain—irrespective of its self-destructive implications for BP in the long term—may be hindering the chances of mitigating climate change on an international scale. In turn, BP continues to reproduce an energy system despite the

contractions that underpin its identity; contradictions which are concealed by 'climate governance' as empty signifier.

7.5. Article IV

Stigma work in action:
The case of the global fossil fuel divestment movement

This study adopts an institutional work perspective to explore how organizations become stigmatized. We base our study within the context of the global fossil fuel divestment movement and focus specifically on intentional stigmatizing efforts of climate activists, identifying two types of work in which they engage. The first concerns meaning work, which involves enacting certain discursive processes—"othering" and "packaging"—that produce stigma in its conceptual form. The second, diffusion work, encompasses direct and indirect transmitting processes by which climate activists encourage powerful actors to join their stigmatizing project. We illustrate the symbolic effects of these processes by demonstrating notable shifts in the framing of fossil fuels and climate change by news media. We also highlight the material effects of stigmatization in terms of increased regulation and legal action taken against the fossil fuel industry. Our study contributes to the literature on organizational stigma by proposing a process model of organizational stigmatization that details the micro-level dynamics that lead to stigma reaching a critical mass.

Divestment is about stigmatizing fossil fuel companies
350.org (2014b), leading climate activist organization

[...] the outcome of this stigmatization process, which the fossil fuel divestment campaign has triggered, poses a far-reaching threat to fossil fuel companies and the vast energy value chain
Ben Caldecott (in Ansar et al., 2013)

A central theme in organizational theory is that favorable social evaluations are important for organizational survival (Elsbach, 1994; Sutton and Callahan, 1987). Increasingly, scholars focus on *stigma* as a particularly negative evaluation that evokes a "perception that an organization possesses a fundamental, deep-seated flaw that deindividuates and discredits the organization" (Devers et al., 2009: 157). To date, explorations of organizational stigma have focused mostly on how stigma is managed after organizations have already become stigmatized (Hampel and Tracey, 2016; Helms and Patterson, 2014). Few studies, however, have examined the emergence of organizational stigma (Mishina and Devers, 2012)— that is, understanding how and why organizations *become* stigmatized. Nevertheless, examining the processes whereby organizational stigma emerges is important so that stigma can be detected and appropriately managed before its effects become irreversible.

Heeding calls from the organizational stigma literature to advance "agentic lenses" (Helms and Patterson, 2014: 1481) and to examine "types of actions or situations that cause or prevent organizational stigmatization" (Devers et al., 2009: 155), this article explores what actors actually do in order to stigmatize organizations. To do so, we focus on the purposive stigmatizing efforts of climate activists who represent a leading force in the fight against climate change – one of society's 'grand challenges' (George et al., 2016). These actors are situated within the global fossil fuel divestment movement, which proposes that investors rid their financial portfolios of fossil fuel assets. Importantly, climate activists encourage divestment not to financially bankrupt the fossil fuel industry, but as a way to vilify fossil fuel

companies as profiting from a morally flawed business model that harms the planet (Ansari et al., 2013).

We draw from the concept of institutional work to explore the processes by which organizational stigma emerges (Lawrence et al., 2013). Institutional work makes explicit the social-symbolic practices that climate activists engage in to construct stigma as a vilifying concept, including how this concept is diffused amongst certain 'key evaluators'. Climate activists attempt to persuade these key evaluators to join the global fossil fuel divestment movement because they have power to enforce stigma onto organizations given their "right to speak" (Hardy and Phillips, 1999). In turn, by endorsing fossil fuel divestment, key evaluators may themselves become stigmatizers, albeit sometimes not knowingly. We illustrate our findings through a dynamic process model of organizational stigmatization, which includes: (1) the *meaning work* required to produce stigma in its conceptual form; (2) the *diffusion work* by which stigma is transmitted to key evaluators; and (3) the symbolic and material effects of these two processes.

In developing our arguments, our study makes the following contributions. First, we empirically illustrate how organizational stigma emerges from the "bottom up," or by intentional efforts of actors that *work* to stigmatize a particular organization and its industry. We offer an alternative explanation to stigma emergence that helps to understand why certain organizations become stigmatized, while others do not. Second, we introduce the concept of "stigma work," which comprises the intentional efforts of meaning and diffusion work and contributes an important addition to the types of work that actors engage in to shape social-symbolic contexts (Phillips and Lawrence, 2012). Third, we demonstrate how stigma reaches a critical mass—necessary for stigma to become self-sustaining—as activists influence key evaluators either directly or indirectly. Here we argue that stigma is organized *relationally* between actions seeking to stigmatize on a micro-level and powerholders on a macro-level (Bitektine and Haack, 2015). Our study thereby unpacks the currently undertheorized notion of "critical mass." Finally, our study illustrates the productive side of stigma. Climate activists

engaged in stigmatization not merely to dislocate the fossil fuel industry from its once moral foundations, but on a deeper level to gain voice and become empowered to fight climate change as a grand challenge (George et al., 2016; Wright and Nyberg, 2016).

7.5.1. Theoretical context

Organizational stigma and its emergence

Stigma is generally attributed to the work of Ervin Goffman who defined stigmatization as a process that involves reducing an individual "in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (1963: 3). Scholars, mostly in the field of sociology (Link and Phelan, 2001) and psychology (Sirey et al., 2001), examine how stigmatizing individuals—e.g., as 'mentally ill' or 'gay'—may result in their exclusion from a society or group. Similar to how individuals may fall victim to stigmatizations, organizations may also be targeted for stigmatization (Devers et al., 2009). Being stigmatized poses a serious threat to organizational survival as key stakeholders such as investors and employees—themselves at risk of being linked to a stigmatized organization—disassociate from the organization (Pozner, 2008; Sutton and Callahan, 1987). Other forms of action against stigmatized organizations include, for instance, consumer boycotts, demonstrations, restrictive legislation, and lawsuits (Hudson, 2008).

Because of the seriousness of this threat, literature on organizational stigma generally focuses on the consequences of stigma, highlighting strategies through which organizations 'deal with' their stigmatization (Mishina and Devers, 2012; Vergne, 2012). Studies have, for example, shown how organizations minimize stigma (Hudson and Okhuysen, 2009), dilute stigma's effects (Durand and Vergne, 2015), eradicate stigma altogether (Hampel and Tracey, 2016), or even use stigma to their own benefit (Tracey and Phillips, 2016). Although this literature provides extensive insights regarding the managing of organizational stigma, few studies have explicitly addressed the ways in which organizations become stigmatized (Mishina and Devers, 2012). Hence, the origins of stigma are usually implicitly assumed rather than explored empirically. To date, scholars typically assume three ways by which

organizational stigma emerges: by *association* (Hudson and Okhuysen, 2009), through *labeling* (Devers et al., 2009), and because of certain *events* (Hudson, 2008).

Association suggests that organizations become stigmatized because of their involvement with other already-stigmatized organizations, or as they form part of a stigmatized group. For example, Hudson and Okhuysen (2009) illustrate how gay bathhouses in the United States must remain discreet to avoid that their customers, suppliers, and regulators themselves become stigmatized given that they are associated with the bathhouse. Another typical instance of stigma through association concerns being a member of, or being linked to certain 'sin industries' such as arms manufacturing, tobacco, or pornography (Galvin et al., 2004; Grougiou et al., 2015). The second way stigma emerges is through *labeling*, which concerns how organizations are given certain pejorative categories, or in some cases negative stereotypes. Depending on the acquired label, the label-baring organization may be perceived as lacking morality (Brewis and Grey, 2008), as deceased or sickly (Hudson and Okhuysen, 2009), or lower-class (Hampel and Tracey, 2016). Finally, being stigmatized through *events* refers to the result of an anomalous occurrence that breaches social norms and values (Hudson, 2008), for example being held responsible for an environmental disaster such as the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico ((Matejek and Gössling, 2014). Importantly, event-stigma can be managed more readily through image repair and should be differentiated from core-stigma, which, once attained, cannot be easily fixed and is near impossible to remove entirely (Hudson, 2008; Hudson and Okhuysen, 2009). This article addresses the latter instance of core-stigma, i.e., stigma attached to what an organization "[…] is, what it does, and whom it serves" (Hudson, 2008: 253).

Whilst these three mechanisms—*association*, *labeling, events*—provide initial insights regarding the ways by which organizations are stigmatized, the specific processes that facilitate the emergence of stigma have yet to be examined in detail (Mishina and Devers, 2012). As such, rather than a dynamic process whereby organizations "become" stigmatized (Chia, 2002), the extant literature on organizational stigma often treats stigma as a state—the

organization either has stigma, or is does not. Such inferences produce a static account of how organizations are stigmatized, and in doing so cannot explain how, "out of a group of organizations that are all at risk of being stigmatized, some firms are able to avoid stigmatization, while others become stigmatized" (Mishina and Devers, 2013: 23). To address this concern, our study draws from the perspective of institutional work, which explicitly considers the micro-dynamics that individuals engage in to shape organizational realities.

Stigmatizing as work

An institutional work perspective recognizes that actors deliberately affect their social-symbolic contexts to advance their own interest (Lawrence, Suddaby, and Leca, 2009; Phillips and Lawrence, 2012). Institutional work is defined as "the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining or disrupting institutions" (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006: 215). Applied to the context of this article, climate activists aim to disrupt the institution of fossil fuel production and consumption through the purposive act of stigmatization. This perspective, which has gained widespread recognition within organization and management theory, is expressly concerned with the interplay between actors' "ability to do otherwise" (Giddens, 1984; Stones, 2005), and the institutions that are implicated by such actions. Institutional work is 'social' in that it happens through human interaction, and it is 'symbolic' in the sense that it emphasizes how meaning is constituted through language and other forms of representation (Phillips and Lawrence, 2012). Indeed, as Lawrence et al (1999: 486) argues, this perspective stresses "the myriad ways in which social actors communicate work not to reflect or represent reality but to actively, and at times strategically, constitute that reality."

Such agentic approaches are also recognized by literatures that address social evaluation of organizations, including, institutional entrepreneurship (Maguire et al., 2008), strategic framing (Cornelissen and Werner, 2014), and social activism (Briscoe and Gupta, 2016). Hence, based on this understanding, organizations are stigmatized not because they engage in deviant behavior *per se*, but because the negative meanings associated with certain

organizational practices are shaped by social-symbolic work (e.g., Maguire and Hardy, 2013). This emphasis on agency is important because, after all, stigma is constructed in practice and does not operate independently from social interaction. Indeed, as Goffman (1963: 11) suggests, in ancient Greece, stigma was intentionally invoked in order to project an inferior moral status—a badge of shame—on individuals and to condemn them from society: "The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places."

In addition to exploring *how* stigma emerges through social-symbolic work, we endeavor to identify the specific actors that actually do the work. In addressing the question of "stigmatized by *whom*?," we foreground actors that openly confess their intentions to stigmatize (Hudson, 2008: 262, italics added). Thus, our approach considers both *stigmatizing action* and *stigmatizing actors*. Interestingly, although Hudson (2008) acknowledges that stigmatization is moderated by the characteristics of stigmatizers (e.g., group size, power, influence), identifying those different actors who do the stigmatizing, and the channels of influence through which they operate, remains somewhat underexplored.

At this point, it is necessary to make an important distinction between actors that have "the right to speak" (Maguire et al., 2004; Phillips, Lawrence, and Hardy, 2004), and by implication the power to stigmatize, and those actors who do not. Actors that have "the right to speak" occupy privileged power positions from where they cast social judgments – we refer to these actors as *key evaluators* throughout this article. The social judgments of key evaluators are often considered credible given their role as experts (Vergne, 2012) or as opinion leaders (Pollock and Rindova, 2003). In addition, key evaluators commonly inhabit centers of power, such as investor groups (Lamin and Zaheer, 2012), industry associations (Maguire and Hardy, 2013) and the professions (Muzio et al., 2013). A central characteristic of key evaluators is that they have the resources needed to ensure that their voice is heard. Indeed, as Link and Phelan (2001: 367) posit: "[…] stigmatization is entirely contingent on access to social, economic, and political power that allows the […] full execution of

disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination." This differs from actors that, irrespective of whether they perceive an organization as fundamentally flawed, struggle to influence others and find credibility for their claims; especially when their claims are rejected by key evaluators (Bitektine and Haack, 2015). Nevertheless, as we demonstrate in our study, these actors are by no means less salient with respect to the process of stigmatization. Rather, as studies of deviance stress: "forms of behavior per se do not differentiate deviants from non-deviants; it is the responses of the conventional and conforming members of the society who identify and interpret behavior as deviant […]" (Kitsuse, 1962: 253). Applied to the context of organizations, Bitektine and Haack (2015: 50) concur, suggesting that social evaluation occurs concurrently on two levels, "by individuals at the micro level and by collective actors at the macro level."

Yet how exactly does this process unfold from the micro-level where individuals perceive an organization as deviant from the macro-level where key evaluators enforce stigma as a social judgment? The extant literature on organizational stigma does not necessary address this puzzle, which is somewhat surprising given that stigma must reach key evaluators at a macro-level to attain a critical mass (Roulet, 2014). This is the tipping point at which "the vilification of the organization becomes self-sustaining and persistent across the stakeholder group as a whole" (Devers et al., 2009: 162). An institutional work perspective is useful here because it emphasizes the practices that are enacted by individuals operating on micro-level aimed at influencing the judgments of key evaluators on the macro-level. Accordingly, as Suddaby et al (2017: 460) argue: "it is individuals who perceive organizations […], render judgments about their legitimacy, and act upon these judgments, eventually producing macro level effects."

In sum, being stigmatized may be detrimental for organizational survival. As such, management and organization scholars have addressed how stigma is appropriately managed, and even benefitted from. However, less is known about how organizational stigma emerges. Understanding the antecedents of organizational stigma is nonetheless important

in order to avoid being stigmatized in the first place. We propose that an institutional work perspective may be particularly useful to explore the emergence of organizational stigma given that it allows us to examine, in detail, the micro-level practices by which organizations "become" stigmatized on a macro-level. As such, taken together, we ask: what are the different types of institutional work actors engage in as they attempt to stigmatize organizations, and what are the institutional effects of this work?

7.5.2. Methods

Research setting: the divestment movement stigmatizes fossil fuels

Our research setting concerns the global fossil fuel divestment movement that emerged during the latter months of 2011, becoming a global phenomenon one year later in 2012. Their message, as stated on one of the official fossil fuel divestment campaigner websites, is simple: "If it is wrong to wreck the climate, then it is wrong to profit from that wreckage. We believe that educational and religious institutions, governments, and other organizations that serve the public good should cut their ties to the fossil fuel industry" (350.org, 2016). The global fossil fuel divestment movement has become the fastest growing divestment campaign in history, with nearly 700 institutions representing over $6 trillion in assets committing to divest (Arabella Advisors, 2016). Notable institutions that have divested include the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Norway's sovereign wealth fund, and Stanford University.

Three events were responsible for the movement's genesis and growth. First, in October 2011, a group of students at Swarthmore College, a private liberal arts college located in Pennsylvania, launched a campaign that urged the college's board to divest its endowment from fossil fuels. Their efforts coincided with a London-based financial think-tank, *Carbon Tracker*, publishing a reported entitled 'Unburnable Carbon' (2012: 2) which suggested that: "[…] global markets are currently treating as assets, reserves equivalent to nearly 5 times the carbon budget for the next 40 years. Only 20% of the total reserves can be burned unabated, leaving up to 80% of assets technically unburnable." Approximately a year thereafter, Bill McKibben—a celebrity environmental activist—published a much-cited article in Rolling

Stone magazine (2012) in which he launched a direct assault against the fossil fuel industry; in tandem initiating a nation-wide fossil fuel divestment tour that acted as a 'call to arms' for the stigmatization of fossil fuels.

To appreciate why fossil fuels companies fell victim to stigmatization, it is important to understand what motivated climate activists to initiate the stigmatization process in the first place: the failure of the transnational climate policy community. The Club of Rome's "Limit to Growth" (Meadows et al., 1972) was one of the first attempts to, on a global scale, problematize the atmosphere's limited capacity to absorb greenhouse gases—including the role of fossil fuels. Today, it is now well established that burning fossil fuels—a process that today accounts for 80% of global primary energy (International Energy Agency, 2014)—releases greenhouse gases and is linked with global warming. The established knowledge of anthropogenic climate change led to the formation of a transnational climate policy community, for instance in form of the *United Nations Environment Program* (UNEP) in 1972, the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC) in 1988, and the *Conference of the Parties* (COP) annual climate negotiation format in 1995.

However, over the next 20 years, use of fossil fuels did not change much. In fact, it actually worsened as consumption levels from 2000–2009 ran at four times the level of 1950–1959 (IEA, 2014). This occurred in light of several failed attempts by the international policy community to curb global emissions after showing some initial hope after the signing of the Kyoto Treaty in 1997, yet disappointingly failing in 2009 at COP 15 in Copenhagen to reinstate legally binding policies (Carter et al., 2011). This climate conference ultimately confirmed that the international policy community was seemingly incapable of tackling climate change (Schussler et al., 2014). The fossil fuel divestment movement often cite these political failures as a reason for trying alternative routes to stop dangerous climate change. Accordingly, environmentalist groups would increasingly shift their attention away from the consumers of fossil fuels to the producers — that is, those that profit from the causes of climate change. Thereby, as climate activists' enemy was clearly defined from the onset of the

movement, their modus operandi was likewise established: "divestment is about stigmatizing fossil fuel companies" (350.org, 2014b).

At this point, it is important to make some clarifying distinctions. When referring to "climate activists" we emphasize those members of the global fossil fuel divestment movement that are associated with environmental NGOs and are generally motivated by moral or affective convictions. When we refer to "the global fossil fuel divestment movement" we refer more broadly to those institutions that encourage fossil fuel divestment for either financial reasons, moral motivations, or both. This distinction is important because, as we show later in the findings, the movement includes a swath of different actors that are in some form or another

5 - Divestment timeline

	Event
	Pre-campaign: 2008 – 2011
2009	Hottest year in history, COP 15 (Copenhagen), EU passes "Fuel Quality Directive"
2010	Hottest year in history, COP 16 (Cancun), Green Climate Fund established
2011	Carbon Tracker (2011) releases "Unburnable Carbon—Are the world's financial markets carrying a carbon bubble?" Swarthmore college calls to divest school endowments
	Campaign: 2012– 2016
2012	Bill McKibben publishes Rolling Stone article, 350.org launches roadshow, global divestment campaign kicks off (McKibben, 2012) Hampshire College, Unity college divest, Seattle divests
2013	Hottest year in history, San Francisco, Berkeley divest Goldman Sachs slams coal (Clark, 2013) EPA considers carbon a dangerous pollutant (Maguire and Hardy, 2013)
2014	Hottest year in history, World bank president Kim and UN Secretary General Moon endorse divestment Norway pension fund, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, British Medical Association, World Council of Churches (Howard, 2014), Stanford University, Glasgow university divest Bank of England governor Mark Carney warns about climate risks 118 institutions, $50 billion divested (Carney, 2014)
2015	Hottest year in history, Keep it in the Ground (The Guardian), Allianz, AXA, CALPERS, Oslo announce to divest (Carrington, 2015) COP 21 (Paris): Paris agreement, UNFCCC endorses divestment, Christiana Figueres addresses fiduciary duty (UNFCCC, 2015) 518 institutions, $3.4 trillion divested (350.org, 2015)

2016	Hottest year in history, DiCaprio at Academy Awards calling out "corporate greed" of the fossil fuel industry G20-Financial Stability Board urges companies to disclose climate-related risks Chatham House report calls current fossil fuel-based business model "no longer fit for purpose" (Stevens, 2016) Exxon Mobil climate fraud investigation in New York state, increase in resolutions at annual shareholder meetings (CIEL, 2016) 689 institutions, $5 trillion divested (350.org, 2016)

associated with the global fossil fuel divestment movement. For instance, several mainstream financial actors—e.g., HSBC, Bank of England, and Goldman Sachs—frequently release statements about fossil fuel divestment, yet do not often engage with moral arguments. Other organizations such as the Church of England or the Rockefeller Foundation engage in both moral and financial arguments. However, we do not consider these as "climate activists" since, as mentioned, they do not identify as an environmentalist organization or as grassroots environmentalists.

Research design and data collection

We selected a single, explorative case study (Baxter and Jack, 2008)and adopted a discourse-analytical approach (Lawrence et al., 1999). This approach was chosen given the need to understand how organizational stigma was socially constructed over time within a specific context (Suddaby et al., 2017). Furthermore, engaging with an explorative case study method opened up the possibility to build theory based on our findings and develop a process model (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). We relied on three data sources to address our research questions, drawing mainly from publicly available secondary data, which we verified with primary data in the form of informal interviews with industry experts.

Internal and external documents. We analyzed a large body of text produced by climate activists, in our case consisting of environmental NGOs, student-based initiatives, and affiliated pro-divestment campaigners. Environmental NGOs included most notably the organization 350.org, which in many ways led the global fossil fuel divestment movement. Their texts consisted of influential publications (e.g., McKibben's Rolling Stone article,

2012), a variety of communiqués (e.g., press releases, public speeches, 'how to' guides on their websites), and campaigning videos. Student-based initiatives ran as independent organizations, often under the auspices of a student organization, society, or club such as People and Planet in the United Kingdom. Their texts consisted of open letters to university boards asking to divest the schools' endowments and later, as concerns spread, of open letters from pro-divestment faculty supporting the cause (e.g., Divest Harvard!).

In addition to climate activist texts, we collected texts from actors that over time played an increasingly important role with regard to the global fossil fuel divestment movement, including transnational policy actors, financial companies, and celebrities. Regarding policy actors, these were mostly from supranational bodies like the European Union, the United Nations, or the International Monetary Fund. We collected reports that explicitly addressed the relationship between climate change and fossil fuels or the fossil fuel industry. This included announcements via press statements (e.g., G7, 2015), during press conferences (e.g., COP 21, 2015), and disclosures about new laws and regulations (e.g., US Clean Power Plan in 2014). Regarding texts of financial industry actors, we collected investor reports and quarterly press releases, paying particular attention to prominent financial institutions or executives (e.g., HSBC, 2015; Carney, 2014) publicly addressing fossil fuel divestment related to climate change. Lastly, as opinion leaders and celebrities became particularly important for the global fossil fuel divestment movement we captured these voices through their public endorsements (e.g., DiCaprio, 2016; Tutu, 2014b).

News media. To address how stigma diffuses, we largely relied on media articles from center-left and center-right, US (*New York Times/Wall Street Journal*) and UK (*The Guardian/Financial Times*) newspapers. Targeting editorial articles rather than factual pieces allowed us to examine texts that revealed opinions, and hence were regarded as a proxy for broad based sentiment towards fossil fuels and climate change (for a similar approach see Roulet, 2014). Using the online Factiva database, we searched articles that directly addressed

the fossil fuel industry, or fossil fuels more generally, in relation to climate change. Covering a timespan from June 2009 to December 2016, we gathered 648 media articles.

Table 6 - Corpus of text for Article IV

Data category	*Document Type*	*Text example*
Environmental campaigner	Public speeches, press releases, websites, press conferences, influential texts, documentaries	350.org press conference (COP Paris, 2015)
Student activists	Letter to university endowment boards, press releases	Fossil fuel divestment statements (Divest Harvard, 2014)
Opinion leader	Press statements, video messages, public speeches	Desmond Tutu letter, The Guardian's "Keep it in the Ground" (2014)
Media	Opinion pieces and editorials	US/UK, liberal (NYT/The Guardian) and conservative (WSJ/FT) newspapers
Policy actors	Policy reports, press releases, speeches, interviews, tweets	Christiana Figueres speech (2014); UNFCCC reports
Investors/ financial industry	Investor reports, press releases, executives publicly addressing divestment/fossil fuels	HSBC stranded assets report (2015); Mark Carney speech (2014)
Opinion leader	Public endorsements by prominent figures, symbolic institutions' divestment statements	Pope's Laudati Si (2015), DiCaprio speeches (2016)

Interviews. Finally, we conducted informal interviews to help inform and confirm our interpretation of the data. This consisted of two interviews with climate activists directly involved with the global fossil fuel divestment movement; three interviews with researchers with expertise in energy, climate change, and sustainability at an international think-tank; and two interviews with individuals working in financial services, the first a senior asset manager at a major Scottish investment firm, and the second a London-based fund manager specializing in environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) issues. We used these accounts to follow up on initial findings, which helped validate our emerging conclusions. Only very slight amends were made. Overall, these sources (Table 6), together, provided a rich description that allowed us to gain a holistic picture of the global fossil fuel divestment

movement's 'story' from *concept* to *effect*. We now turn to the exact procedure involved with analyzing our data.

Analytic strategy

Our analytic strategy consisted of four stages. During the first stage, we familiarized ourselves with the various data accounts and plotted a detailed event timeline (van de Ven and Poole, 1995), resulting in a chronicled narrative regarding fossil fuels and climate change (see also Maguire, 2004). In doing so, we were intrigued by recurring references to the failure of the climate summit in Copenhagen and its impact in the emerging climate change-fossil fuel discourse (Carter et al., 2011). As Copenhagen marked an important turning point, we endeavored to begin our analysis from 2009 and onward. We separated the case into two brackets (Langley, 1999), with the 'pre-campaign period' ranging from Copenhagen in December 2009 to the start of the global divestment campaign in June 2012. Since organized attempts at stigmatizing the fossil fuel industry increased exponentially after 2012, this bracket served as our baseline period. The 'campaign period' started from the inception of the campaign in 2012 until June 2016. This end date was selected since it encompassed six months after the passing of the Paris Agreement, allowing enough time to capture any stigma effects as a result of the agreement.

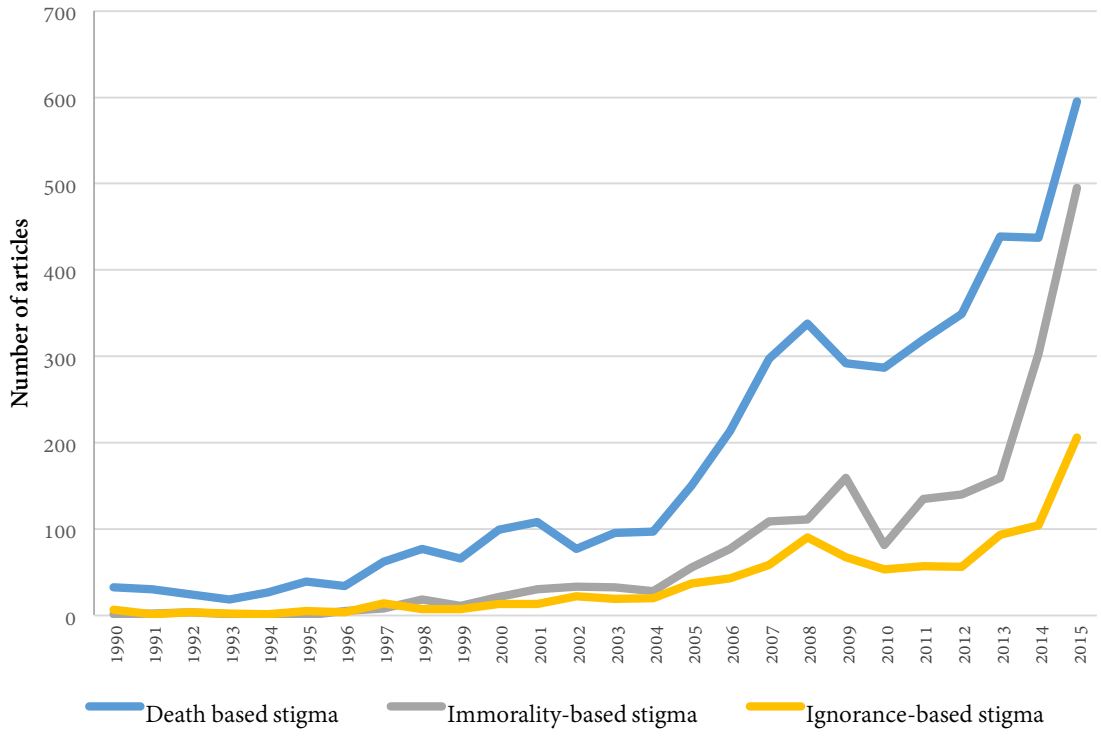
In the second stage of analysis, we turned to climate activists' texts. Our analysis involved both authors using qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) to independently engage in open coding—based on coherent unit of meanings, typically either one sentence or a short paragraph—to highlight initial themes within the campaigner texts (Strauss and Corbin, 2007). Our objective was to understand the main arguments of climate activists, focusing particular on their descriptions of the relationship between fossil fuels and climate change. We therefore coded each description individually, which resulted in approximately 250 individual codes. These were then rearranged based on overlaps, and ordered into themes. To interpret these themes, we returned to some of the early literature on stigma from which we made abductive inferences (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). Abduction in this case is helpful in

relating our observations to well-established theory—especially that of Goffman—and vice versa, thereby guiding the interpretation of our data (Silverman, 2010). In doing so, we identified four main micro-dynamics that climate activists used—marking, differentiating, categorizing, and tagging (see Table 7). We were able to collapse these into two main practices: *'othering' and 'packaging'*.

The third stage of analysis addressed the processes by which stigma was diffused amongst key evaluators. To do so, we revisited our event timeline and "traced" how different 'stigma categories' (see Table 7) travelled over time (see Figure 12). We also identified specific time points that were salient with respect to the stigmatization of the fossil fuel industry. Thereby, we were able to identify the practices that facilitated stigma to diffuse among key evaluators—we refer to these as transmitting practices. From our interpretative analysis of these connections between key evaluators and climate activists' stigmatizing practices, we quickly realized that two diffusion paths exist. Whilst stigma diffused directly with regard to opinion leaders and celebrities who were also influenced early on in the campaign, financial and policy evaluators were swayed through indirect transmitting practices.

The fourth and final stage of our analysis involved analyzing the effects of these stigmatization dynamics (Bitektine and Haack, 2015). Accordingly, we explored shifts in the media's framing of the relationship between fossil fuels and climate change. We compared all instances within our media text from the pre-campaign period and contrasted this with the framing in the campaign period, ultimately identifying three main shifts: *from operational challenges to core problems; from partial acceptance to absolute removal;* and *from altering demand to shunning supply*. Furthermore, as our analysis progressed, it became increasingly difficult to ignore that the stigmatizing efforts of climate activists were also having material effects. These included financial effects pertaining to the physical amount of money divested, economic impacts on fossil fuel companies, changing (transnational) regulation, and in terms of law suits pressed against the industry.

Figure 12 – Prevalence of stigma categories in news articles from 1990-2015

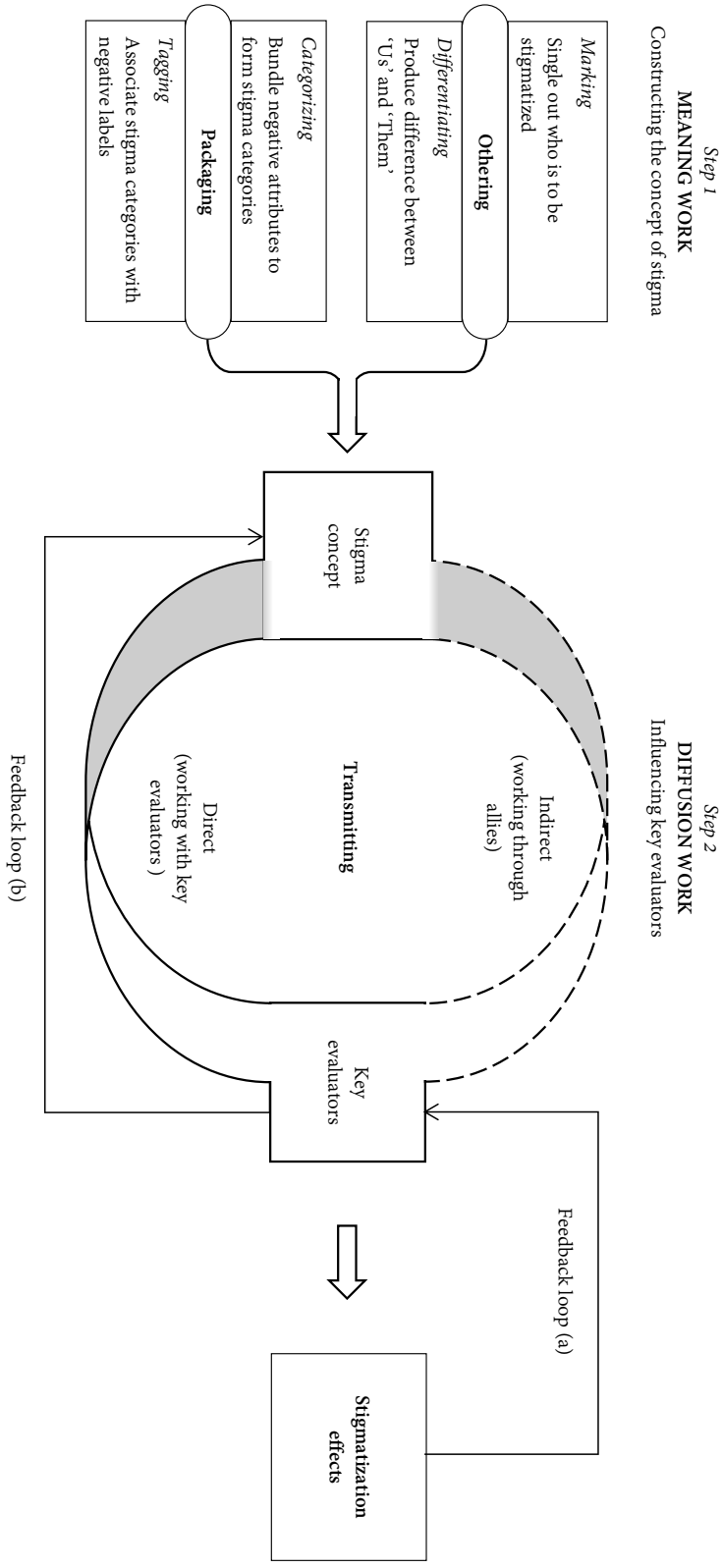


7.5.3. Findings

The global divestment movement: a case of organizational stigmatization

Our findings suggest a dynamic process model of organizational stigmatization (Figure 13) that illustrates two types of institutional work – 'meaning work' and 'diffusion work'. We theorized this model in an attempt to answer our research question of how organizations become stigmatized through purposive action. To improve readability, we present the process model upfront, although strictly speaking it represents the final result of our data analysis. In the ensuing section, we present our findings based on the flow of our dynamic process model, exploring each work type in succession.

Figure 13 - Process model of organizational stigmatization



The first part of the model addresses meaning work, which involves two processes—othering and packaging—that activists enact to produce stigma as a concept. *Othering* concerns marking a target to be stigmatized and constructing the difference between 'Us' (the stigmatizer) and 'Other' (the target for stigmatizing). *Packaging* involves producing stigma categories by bundling together negatively connoted terms and associating these with certain vilifying labels. As an outcome of both processes, stigma becomes meaningful by taking on a conceptual form.

The second part of the model regards 'diffusion work' and specifies the ways by which activists influence key evaluators through a process that we refer to as *transmitting*. This usually takes one of two routes. Either activists influence key evaluators by directly transmitting stigma, or they work in partnership with allied actors and thereby influence key evaluators indirectly. On the one hand, direct transmitting is employed with respect to key evaluators that already share a radical approach to social change similar to that of climate activists. In such cases, stigma travels overtly – i.e., the stigmatizing intentions of climate activists is apparent to key evaluators. On the other hand, indirect transmitting is employed with regard to key evaluators that are considered non-radical; here, stigma is translated so that it is more suitable for the appropriation of key evaluators. Stigma therefore often travels covertly. In cases where the stigma is indeed acquired by a key evaluator, irrespective of how it was diffused, climate activists utilize their endorsement to bolster their legitimacy (as indicated by the legitimation feedback loop). The main idea here is that diffusion of stigma is a mediated process whereby stigma is co-constructed between those seeking to stigmatize (climate activists), their allies, and key evaluators.

The third part of our model illustrates the symbolic and material effects of engaging in both types of work. Symbolic shifts are demonstrated by showing how the media's framing of the fossil fuel-climate change relationship shifts over time. Material effects are evidenced by changes in regulation, industry law suits, and in terms of financial and economic implications that are associated with the global fossil fuel divestment campaign. As indicated in our

dynamic process model, we again include a feedback loop to account for the influence of these symbolic and material effects on the judgements of key evaluators.

Meaning Work

Activists are producers of stigma as they articulate what stigma means, and how the stigmatized look. Through such processes of signification—or, 'meaning work'—activists attempt to bring stigma into being. We illustrate two practices that constitute meaning work, *othering* and *packaging*, and also highlight the micro-dynamics that are typically enacted within each type of work.

Othering

involves establishing a distinction between who is to be stigmatized, and by implication, who is not. This practice of inclusion-exclusion is commonly enacted through two micro-dynamics. The first regards *differentiating* between 'Us' and 'Other'; whereas 'Us' is constructed as normal and acceptable, 'Other' is the antithesis, not 'normal', and unacceptable. This micro-practice of *differentiating* has a dual effect in that, by defining the other, climate activists also define themselves. As expressed by McKibben in his *Rolling Stone* article (2012):

> *[…] these are no longer normal companies. They are rogues, breaking not the laws of the nation, but the laws of physics. And there is no gentle way to rein in rogues. […] students know all this—they understand the grave importance of this battle. They know that heroes of the past, like Desmond Tutu, have joined their voices to the call.*

Here McKibben engages in differentiation by first indicating that there exists an abnormality with regard to fossil fuel companies, after which he proceeds to delineate between these "rogues" and students, who are grouped together with a Nobel Peace Prize winner, Desmond Tutu. It is therefore made clear who is good and who is bad. This micro-practice of othering is sometimes enacted to create 'others' within an already 'othered' group, as Jamie Henn, co-founder of 350.org, remarks: "Coal does the most to pollute our climate, but it's the oil

industry that does the most to corrupt our politics. They're the major power players we need to stigmatize in order to make the space for progress" (in Howard, 2015a).

Othering is usually accompanied by calls for action to ostracize those groups that constitute 'the other', a practice that is exemplified by the frequent use of the term 'sever' by the fossil fuel divestment movement. Bob Massie, CEO of the New Economics Institute, asserts: "We have had enough. We must sever the ties with those who profit from climate change—now" (in Mckibben, 2012). The pervasive reference to severing is analogous to an infected limb that, left with no option, is amputated to save the rest of the body. Likewise, fossil fuel divestment infers dismembering certain assets from a portfolio; there is no 'cure' for those assets that are tainted—they must be removed completely.

The second micro-dynamic concerns *marking*, which is enacted to visually distinguish *who* is to be stigmatized. This entails using certain artifacts to mark 'the other', which generally takes two common forms. The first has the rather formal function of materially identifying which companies to target for divestment. The most widely circulated mechanism used by activists is *The Carbon Underground 200* index, which was created by a former Managing Director at Standard and Poor's after attending a speech by McKibben on his 'Do the Math' tour (Fossil Free Indexes, 2014). Activists rely on the index when asking target institutions to engage in divestment and encourage private investors to use it too. Accordingly, by being singled out for divestment, and being 'on the list', a firm also becomes singled out as a target for stigmatization. As such, *The Carbon Underground 200* is not merely a financial instrument but an affective marking device, or, as it sometimes referred to, the 'hit list' for stigmatization (Yeo, 2014).

Marking also involves attaching certain physical symbols to the fossil fuel industry. Common symbols include the use of a distinctive 'X' by activists, which is also the official logo of the divestment campaigners (350.org, 2015). In some cases, the X is physically tagged to an organization's own logo (e.g., BGT, 2015). Alternately, whereas 'X', as 'the mark of stigma', is created and then attached, the fossil fuel divestment movement also use preexisting

markings already associated with fossil-fuel industry and reframe these in some way pejorative. For instance, the Guardian's *Keep it in the Ground* (2014)campaign foregrounds the blackness of oil and associates this with a 'dark side'—unclean, sticky, suffocating.

Packaging

Activists engage in packaging to structure stigma in such a way that it is affective and accessible for key evaluators to readily appropriate. There are two micro-dynamics that are important here. The first regards *categorizing* whereby devaluing attributes are grouped together to produce certain stigma categories, in this case: 'death-based stigma'; 'immorality-based stigma'; and 'ignorance-based stigma' (see Table 7). Each category also contains certain negative labels. These are used with regard to the second micro-dynamic, tagging, which concerns the way the fossil fuel industry is negatively labeled. Below we illustrate the construction of each category individually, including the specific labels with which the fossil fuel industry is tagged.

Table 7 - Campaigners' meaning work

Practices	Micro dynamics	Stigma concepts	Illustrative Examples
Othering	Differentiating	*Us vs. them*	We need to sever our ties with this rogue industry (Klein, 2014)
		Unacceptable and "not-normal"	These are no longer normal companies […]. There is no flaw in their business plans. The flaw is their business plans (McKibben, 2012).
	Marking	*Carbon Underground 200*	The Carbon Underground 200 identifies the top 100 public coal companies globally and the top 100 public oil and gas companies globally, ranked by the potential carbon emissions content of their proven reserves (fossilfreeindexes.com).
		Mark of stigma	*"X"* (350.org)
		Dirty	"dirty," "unclean" "toxic," "decay," "filth," suffocating (Guardian, 2014)

Packaging	Categorizing	*Death-based stigma*	Climate change poses the single biggest threat to the health of humanity over the next few decades […]. It is already causing deaths, ill health and suffering (David McKoy, Medact, 2014).
		Immorality-based stigma	We know our climate is in crises, and we know who is responsible and how to stop them: Divestment, the breaking of ties with an immoral industry (350.org 2016)
		Ignorance-based stigma	Coal does the most to pollute our climate, but it's the oil industry that does the most to corrupt our politics. They're the major power players we need to stigmatize in order to make the space for progress (350.org, 2015)
	Tagging	*Merchants of death*	This is as simple as I can say it: water is life, oil is death. […] Oil is some stuff that's been dead for millions of years. […]. Somebody's got to brainstorm to go and dig up a bunch of dead stuff and then burn it (Vin Jones, 2015
		Public enemy	Divestment is very useful for shaming companies; it is very useful for bringing the issue out into the open more. It provides a really powerful moral framework. It's not a bout technological change, it's not scientific change, it is about social change. We should be tackling the fossil fuel industry directly. Leave it in the ground (The Guardian, 2015)
		Criminals	It's very fitting that they've (here: Stanford) chosen to cut their ties to the 18th century technology of digging up black rocks and burning them (McKibben, 2014).
		Backward and unscientific	I want to say that laws that actually allow fossil fuel expansion might give it legality, […] but it is criminal activity. And today we should understand that as slave owners at one point were very respectable in high society, the fossil fuel leaders of today are no different than the slave owners of yesterday (Naidoo, 2015).

In terms of 'death-based stigma', associations such as disease, toxic and decay are grouped together and attributed to the fossil fuel industry. This categorization dynamic infers that the fossil fuel industry is responsible for causing deaths related to climate change, which, according to Harvard's divestment campaigners (2014) is "the biggest global health threat of the 21st century." Such efforts are frequently buttressed with provocative imagery related to other types of diseases, notably cancer and obesity. For example, the lead activist website—350.org—compares the effects of emissions from fossil fuels on earth with that of weight gain (2015): "We're like the patient that goes to the doctor and learns he's overweight, or his cholesterol is too high."

Besides this analogy's morbid connotation, it also infers that producing, consuming, and/or marketing fossil fuels, about obesity, is a 'choice', the repercussion of which causes harm. Accordingly, fossil fuel companies are depicted as in some way agentic exerting their "massive financial muscle" (WSJ, 2012) and relentless at pursuing an intrinsic money obsession as argued by Tutu (2014b): "[it] is clear that those primarily responsible for accelerating climate change are not simply going to give up; they stand to make too much money." Death-based stigma also relates to the destructiveness of the fossil fuel industry, which is framed as being especially pronounced in relation to climate change. McKibben (2012), for instance, proposes: "[…] we need to view the fossil-fuel industry in a new light. It has become a rogue industry, reckless like no other force on Earth. It is Public Enemy Number One to the survival of our planetary civilization." Through this common association, the fossil fuel industry is tagged with the label of, as McKibben suggests, 'Public Enemy Number One'.

Regarding 'immorality-based stigma', the fossil fuel industry is emphasized as engaging in illicit behavior—it is corrupt, unjust, and deceitful. This is captured in a letter by pro-divestment faculty to Harvard University's president, urging to divest the University's endowments (Divest Harvard, 2014):

> *We now know that fossil fuels cause climate change of unprecedented destructive potential. We also know that many in this industry spend large sums of money to mislead the public, deny climate science, control legislation and regulation, and suppress alternative energy sources.*

Here, campaigners relate acts of deception to the fossil fuel industry, therefore emphasizing immoral behavior. This notably occurs by highlighting the deceiving tactics used by ExxonMobil to mislead the public, coupled with their funding of climate science denial (Goldenberg, 2015). Other associations to deceitfulness include comparing fossil fuel companies to those of the tobacco industry. For instance, McKibben (2012) comments on the lobbying efforts of fossil fuel companies: "[this] is no different than the tobacco industry—for years, they lied about the dangers of their industry." Besides labelling those in the industry as 'liars', immorality-based stigma also involves labelling the fossil fuel companies as 'criminal'. This is exemplified by Kumi Naidoo (2015), executive director of Greenpeace, stating in a press conference at COP 21 in Paris:

> *Just because slavery was legal once didn't mean it was right. […] Because apartheid was legal, did not make it right. So today I want to say that laws that actually allow fossil fuel expansion, might give it legality, […] but it is criminal activity. And today we should understand that as slave owners at one point, were very respectable in high society, the fossil fuel leaders of today are no different than the slave owners of yesterday.*

In this case, powerful association between fossil fuel companies and previous acts of human rights abuses are invoked, highlighting the criminal nature of such activity. Indeed, the appropriation of the divestment movement during apartheid in South Africa is ubiquitous throughout the divestment campaign (Howard, 2015a; Tutu, 2014a).

In terms of 'ignorance-based stigma', fossil fuel companies are tagged with labels such as backward and un-scientific. 'Big Oil' is often placed at the forefront of attacks and denounced for their apparent "slow evolution on climate change policy" (Davenport, 2013). In addition, fossil fuel companies are demonized for their apparent simplemindedness, as exemplified by McKibben's (2012) reference to the industry's "18th century technology of digging up black

rocks and burning them," and how owning fossil fuel shares equates to "investing in companies that are running Genesis backwards." Besides this proclaimed scientific backwardness, activists point to a lack of basic understanding regarding financial markets, as indicated by Ruth Hennig (in Reuters, 2014), executive director of the John Merck Fund: "[…] we are relying on a growing list of financial analyses that refute the conventional wisdom that divesting from fossil fuel stocks leads to greater risk or lower returns."

Diffusion work

In order to influence key evaluators, activists engage in diffusion work. The main process enacted here regards *transmitting*, which refers to the interaction that occurs between those actors whose intent it is to stigmatize (climate activists), and those who actually have the power to confer stigma – i.e., key evaluators. In the case of our study this entails persuading key evaluators to divest from fossil fuels or endorse the divestment campaign, which occurs either through direct or indirect transmitting dynamics. As illustrated below, direct transmitting is employed to influence key evaluators that share a radical approach to social change, and who might already be politically involved with disruptive institutional work with respect to the fossil fuel industry. Here, stigma is transmitted through a relatively close relationship between activists and key evaluators. Conversely, with key evaluators that do not share the same radical approach, stigma is transmitted directly and thereby translated to align with interests of key evaluators. To do so, actors transmit stigma by working *through* already allied actors that are considered legitimate by both key evaluators and activists. In these instances, because there is no direct relationship between activists and key evaluators, coupled with stigma being translated during the transmitting process, stigma may travel covertly. We also show how, in some cases, transmitting dynamics occur simultaneously. Below we demonstrate how these two transmitting processes unfold, with three evaluators in particular—investors, policy actors and opinion leaders.

Stigma diffusion through indirect transmitting

Over the course of the campaign, indirect transmitting occurred most noticeably in terms of influencing key evaluators associated with financial services. In this respect, climate activists worked through allied financial organizations, most of which were engaged in 'green' fund management, sustainable finance, or proposed fossil fuel divestment due to financial, as opposed to strong moral concerns.

One of these allies was financial think-tank Carbon Tracker, which worked with several other climate activist groups to promote fossil fuel divestment. 350.org and Carbon Tracker became emblematic of the campaign, the Guardian for instance referring to the "Carbon Tracker/Bill McKibben numbers" in relation of divestment (Clark, 2015). Indeed, Carbon Tracker (2012) , in cooperation with The Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, published research that prompted several mainstream investment banks—notably Standard and Poor's, HSBC, and Goldman Sachs—to also issue research reports. Several activist groups also began to pursue both formal and informal partnerships with one another and with environmentally concerned investor groups (Gunther, 2015). For example, links were established between activists from 350.org and investor groups that already shared similar views on sustainable investing, such as: Al Gore's Generation Investment (Gore and Blood, 2013); sustainable investment group, Ceres; and billionaire hedge fund manager Tom Steyer (Barbaro and Davenport, 2014). Alliances were also formed with the co-founder of investment group GMO, Jeremy Grantham (2013), which also began to contribute financially in terms of sponsoring 350.org.

Through these types of relationships with 'green' financial players, climate activists engaged in indirect transmitting. Indeed, working *through* these allies helped translate stigma, necessary to increase the likelihood that key evaluators might appropriate stigma. Relatedly, through indirect transmitting dynamics, activists obtained new terminology traditionally not associated with grassroots environmental activism. For example, on several activist websites, 'how-to guides' were published which contained information about the world of investment

and finance for activists to study and 'talk the talk'. One website suggested, "[…] while it's important to point out the positive statistics on fossil free portfolio performance, leading with divestment as a money making strategy isn't a great idea. […] Focusing on climate risk and 'risk exposure' of a portfolio to fossil fuels is a more persuasive line" (Fossil Free UK, 2014).

During the years following this early period, mainstream financial institutions increasingly engaged fossil fuel divestment and, by implication, stigma. For example, Deutsche Bank, in the title of a statement on how climate change affects investment decisions posed the question, '*Would you drive a motorcycle without a helmet?*' (Miltner, 2015); evoking both 'death-based stigma' (potential death from motorcycle crash), and 'immorality-based stigma' (negligence of embracing dangerous act). In a similar vein, Mercer's (2015: 2) report opens with their Global Head of Investment Research, Deb Clarke stating:

> *More than two centuries of economic development has been supported by access to cheap fossil fuels. […] Evidence of the potential impacts that emissions-related temperature increases will have on resource availability, physical asset damage, and human health are driving the need for policy action.*

Mercer's report goes on to predict in their 'transformation scenario'—essential in order to remain under the 2° Celsius threshold—that "coal and oil sector returns could be eroded over the next 10 years" (2015: 62). Senior figures of public financial institutions also began to voice their concerns about a fossil-fuel based economy, notably by the Bank of England Director Mark Carney, who warned of the financial instability that would ensue given further fossil fuel investment: "The challenges currently posed by climate change pale in significance compared with what might come. […] Once climate change becomes a defining issue for financial stability, it may already be too late" (Elliott, 2015b).

The unexpected cases in which conservative actors began making statements about fossil fuels and climate change that were indicative of activists' stigma categories were particularly striking. Even the Rockefeller family, who built their fortune on fossil fuel exploration through companies such as Standard Oil and later ExxonMobil, in March 2014 decided to

abandon fossil fuels "as quickly as possible," evoking 'ignorance-based stigma' by stating: "There is no *sane* rationale for companies to continue to explore for new sources of hydrocarbons" (Foley, 2014). Similarly, Goldman Sachs sold a substantial proportion of its hydrocarbon assets; one of it analysts drew on death-based stigma by proposing that coal has reached the beginning of its end: "As a worker celebrating their 65th birthday can settle into a more sedate lifestyle while they look back on past achievements, we argue that thermal coal has reached its retirement age" (Hume, 2016).

Stigma diffusion through direct transmitting

Direct transmitting occurred in particular with regard to opinion leaders. In this respect, activists were able to influence opinion leaders, who often had a pre-existing leaning toward environmental causes. We highlight below the direct diffusion processes aimed at celebrities, religious leaders, and intellectuals. Celebrities, mostly from the film industry, played a significant role in furthering stigma. Frequently, celebrities that supported the global fossil fuel divestment movement often did so in direct partnership with activist organizations, featuring on campaigner websites, marching alongside activists at climate change demonstrations, and co-hosting fossil fuel divestment events. Of the many celebrities that endorsed the divestment movement, Leonardo DiCaprio was arguably the most salient supporter, announcing in September in 2015 that he would divest his own financial assets and that of his foundation (Howard, 2015b). During a press conference hosted in collaboration with Divest-Invest, a philanthropy organization funded by the Wallace Global Fund which funds other environmentalist organizations such as 350.org and Carbon Tracker, DiCaprio stated: "Climate change is severely impacting the health of our planet and all of its inhabitants, and we must transition to a clean energy economy that does not rely on fossil fuels, the main driver of this global problem" (UNFCCC, 2015). Here, DiCaprio draws on death-based stigma by underscoring the potential of severe harmfulness for the health of the planet, and does so through enacting marking dynamics, signaling fossil fuels as the cause of the problem. Indeed, DiCaprio went on to become somewhat of a 'poster boy' for the global

fossil fuel divestment movement, speaking about divestment at the Academy Awards in (2016)while accepting his Oscar:

> *We simply cannot afford to allow the corporate greed of the coal, oil and gas industries to determine the future of humanity. Those entities with a financial interest in preserving this destructive system have denied, and even covered up the evidence of our changing climate. Enough is enough, you know better, the world knows better, history will place the blame for this devastation squarely at their feet. Our planet cannot be saved unless we leave fossil fuels in the ground where they belong.*

In this quote, DiCaprio exemplifies the practice of othering as he clearly refers to 'Us' by referencing 'we' and 'you', and associating these with positive connotations such as 'knowing better' or 'humanity'. This is contrasted to 'the others'—i.e., the 'coal, oil and gas industries', 'them', 'those entities'—who are linked to negative associations such as 'greed', 'covering up', 'destructive', and 'to be blamed'. Through emphasizing 'Us' and 'Other' as simplified polarizations between good and evil, DiCaprio creates an in-group reference, which is necessary to knowingly stigmatizing the out-group, or the 'Other'.

Opinion leaders connected to faith groups and religious organizations were often also directly influenced encouraged to adopt stigma. In fact, these organizations were early adopters of divestment policies, even before the campaign started in 2012 given their refusal to invest in 'sin-industries' such as gambling, pornography, and weapons producers. There was, in addition, a strong moral argument made by climate activists which resonated with religious organizations. Divestment sentiments even reached an especially high-order as, on June 18th, Pope Francis (2015) in the released encyclical stated: "We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels […] needs to be progressively replaced without delay." Similarly, Archbishop Desmond Tutu sided closely with activists and co-released several statements condemning fossil fuels, for example in a video statement released on 350.org's (2015) YouTube channel, in which he states: "corporations understood the logic of money even when they weren't swayed by the dictates of morality. […] Once again we can join together as a world and put pressure where it counts." Due to his involvement with the

Apartheid struggle in South Africa, Tutu played a significant role in the global fossil fuel divestment movement given the importance that divestment played in pressuring the South African government at the time to abandon Apartheid. Tutu featured since the beginning of the campaign, appearing for instance during segments of 350.org's 'Do the Math' tour, and continued a strong connection to the organization, appearing on several videos with McKibben.

Several academic opinion leaders were likewise closely affiliated with the divestment campaign and therefore were influenced through direct transmitting dynamics. Noam Chomsky, for instance, joined student protests at MIT and appeared in several media stating his direct support for the campaign. Chomsky was also one of the 27 faculty members of MIT to sign a petition urging the university to divest its fossil fuel assets and "to end the addiction to fossil fuels that is causing the climate chaos that is just beginning" (Chomsky et al., 2016). Michael Mann, who published the famous 'hockey stick' global warming graph, and leading NASA climatologist James Hansen also signed the letter.

Combining both dynamics: Stigma diffusion through direct and indirect transmitting.

To influence policy actors, activists enacted a combination of direct and indirect transmitting processes. With respect to direct transmitting, the United Nations and the UNFCCC were targeted in the hope that their support would 'trickle *across*' to other supra-national bodies and then 'trickle *down*' to national-policy level. For example, at the end of 2013 over 75 civil society organizations, including Friends of the Earth and 350.org, released a letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres calling for "new rules to safeguard the global climate talks from the undue influence of the fossil fuel industry" (350.org, 2013) Their concern was spurred by the Polish hosts of the 19th Conference of the Parties co-hosting a side event—the 'International Coal and Climate Summit'—with World Coal Association, which civil society organizations argued was "falsely presenting coal as a central part of the solution to climate change and development" (globalwitness.org, 2013). The UNFCCC found itself in an unjustifiable position, given that

other UN organizations ban the involvement of certain actors that contradict its mandate; notably as the World Health Organization (WHO, 2008: 2) forbids the tobacco industry from taking part in its policy process, given the "fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the tobacco industry's interests and public health policy interests."

Accordingly, activists launched several campaigns over the next year exposing the contradictory nature of the UNFCCC's relationship with fossil fuel companies. as a researcher at Corporate Europe Observatory remarked: "It's just common sense that those who are causing the crisis should be kept as far away from solving it as possible" (350.org, 2014a). In addition, activists presented a petition, which gathered over 53,000 signatures, to the UNFCCC calling the ban of fossil fuel companies and their lobbyists from the UN Climate Talks. In November 2014, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon finally urged "companies like pension funds or insurance companies to reduce their investments in coal and a fossil-fuel based economy" (UNFCCC, 2014). Yet the UN were not at this point willing to endorse activists' efforts; its tone was cautious as not to upset other UN projects such as the UN Global Compact (which includes a number of major fossil fuel companies), amongst others.

However, after about a year, the persistent efforts of activists started having an effect. The UNFCCC became increasingly radical in its tone: in March 2015, it officially backed divestment by tweeting: "#Divestment worked to free SA of #apartheid. Now it can help free us of #fossilfuels @350." The tweet was linked to an activist's Twitter account (@350), and also accompanied a quote by Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "People of conscience need to break their ties with corporations financing the injustice of climate change" (Carrington, 2015a). As policy actors became radicalized, their messages about divestment contained increasingly more stigma categories. For example, UNFCCC Climate Chief Christiana Figueres noted: "[…] unchecked climate change has the potential to impact and eventually devastate the lives, livelihoods and savings of many, now and well into the future" (Go Fossil Free, 2016). Figueres' reference to 'devastation' in this quote, from a speech to investors in

New York with assets worth more than $20 trillion, goes beyond mere 'savings' by referencing the lives and livelihoods of future generations.

Crucially, as the UNFCCC increasingly became an associated with the fossil fuel divestment movement, activists could work through the UNFCCC and other UN related organizations such as the UNEP to influence other policy actors. This is typical of indirect transmitting as both climate activists and the UNFCCC were able to purport stigma without seeming necessarily anti-capitalistic or against the use of market mechanisms. In turn, organizations such as the World Bank began incorporating stigma into their own disclosures about climate change. For instance, as highlighted in January 2014 by World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim (2014) at the World Economic Forum, in Davos, Switzerland:

> *There are no more excuses. If we fail, our children and grandchildren will ask us why we didn't act when it was still possible to do so […]. Sooner rather than later, [financial regulators] must address the systemic risk associated with carbon-intensive activities in their economies, made clear, of course, by price signals.*

Stigmatization effects

The two types of work illustrated above have both material and symbolic effects. In this section we illustrate these effects, first by demonstrating shifts in the news media's framing of fossil fuels in relations to climate change; comparing the *pre-campaign* period with that of the *campaign* period (see Table 8 below). Thereafter, we demonstrate how the institutional work of the climate activists resulted in certain material impacts, which we illustrate through regulative and economic indicators.

Table 8 - Symbolic stigmatization effects

News media frame shifts	
Pre-campaign: 2009–2011	*Campaign: 2012–2016*
From operational concerns …	**…to core problems.**
In the near term at least, we have no choice but to continue using fossil fuels. Ending our reliance on them instead requires a serious commitment to achieving breakthroughs in green energy technology. (WSJ, 2010)	The business models of fossil fuel companies, which continue to spend billions on searching for new reserves, are endangering the climate. (Guardian, 2015)
From partial acceptance…	**…to absolute removal.**
How to end america's addiction to oil? By using more electricity, natural gas and biofuels in our transportation fleet (WSJ, 2010)	The bottom line is clear: Congress should end the subsidies to Big Oil and redeploy the money saved to support truly new energy technologies, like wind and solar power, or even high-tech biofuels that don't harm the environment and threaten the food supply. (NYT, 2012)
From altering demand…	**…to shunning supply.**
You don't have to look far for proof that this country must cut its dependence on fossil fuels and develop cleaner sources of energy. (NYT, 2010)	Investors are realizing the business models and future assumptions of big coal are fundamentally flawed. (Guardian, 2015)

Symbolic effects

From operational challenges to core problems. Over time, judgment shifts from emphasizing what fossil fuel companies do—extract, produce, and market fossil fuels—to their core *being*, or who they are. Accordingly, *pre-campaign* framing problematizes a broad array of operational activities related to the industry, which Ed Miliband—then UK's Energy and Climate Change Secretary—argued are fixable by developing "clean fossil fuels" (Vidal, 2009). This technocratic reliance is pervasive through the *pre-campaign* period in which attacks against fossil fuels are fended off by proposed all-encompassing solutions such as

carbon-capture and storage and operational efficiency measures. This picture shifted during the course of the campaign: technical concerns were increasingly sidelined as evaluation turned to what fossil fuel companies *are*—placing their very identity as fossil fuel companies under scrutiny. As one campaigner put it: "[…] this is as simple as I can say it: water is life; oil is death" (Robinson, 2016).

From partial acceptance to absolute removal. How to tackle climate change, including the role of fossil fuels, shifted considerably between periods. Whereas the *pre-campaign* stressed a gradual transition towards a low-carbon future in which fossil fuels such as natural gas play a crucial role in easing the transition, the latter end of the *during-campaign* period emphasized a complete elimination of all fossil fuels. Increasingly, a more drastic transformative change became the dominant proposition, in which fossil fuels are proposed to be phased out rapidly. For example, in a statement released after the G7 Summit in Seoul, governments reaffirm their commitment: "to phase-out over the medium term inefficient fossil fuel subsidies; […] and combat the challenges of global climate change" (Wynn, 2010). Here governments highlight their intent to reduce fossil fuel subsidies and emphasize a specific medium-term timeframe—with no concrete sense of urgency. This changed when, in an unprecedented move, policy makers' commitment to decarbonize the global economy and underline the necessity for urgent and concrete action. In 2015, the G7 declared that: "Urgent and concrete action is needed to address climate change […]. We emphasize that deep cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions are required with a decarbonisation of the global economy over the course of this century" (Light, 2015).

From altering demand to shunning supply. The focus of evaluation is localized as it shifts from being dispersed to focused. Thus, stigma emerges as the blame for climate change shifts from 'those that use fossil fuels' to 'those that produce fossil fuels'. For example, during the *pre-*campaign period, energy efficiency was stressed as an issue related to consumption: "Improving US energy efficiency […] is key to reducing emission of greenhouse gases and consumption of fossil fuels in near term and that great gains can be made because US is

currently such an inefficient user of energy" (NYT, 2009). This contrasts with the *during*-campaign, where responsibility shifted toward those that produce fossil fuels: "As part of a fast-growing campaign, […] fossil fuel company stocks have been divested […] on the basis that their business models are incompatible with the pledge by the world's governments to tackle global warming" (Carrington, 2015c). The change in framing therefore moves from attributing agency to those users at the end of the value chain—consumers of energy—to the point where it is produced—fossil fuel companies.

Material effects

Tentative evidence for the stigmatization of fossil fuels also includes material impacts of campaigners' work that extend beyond the aforementioned shifts in language, frames, and high-profile endorsements. Besides the number of institutions divested from fossil fuels, endorsements by key evaluators, and the actual amount of money being divested over the course of the campaign (from $0 in 2009; to $2b in 2012; and over $6b in 2016), stigma is "experienced" through other forms of social action (Hudson, 2008). Most notably, this materialization of stigma includes regulatory changes.

Changes in the environmental legislation, law suits, and judicial investigations that were instigated by the fossil fuel divestment movement are significant. As one legal scholar notes: "stigmatization can […] foreshadow legislation. This is one of the most consistent results of divestment campaigns, and is a likely and desirable outcome of the fossil fuel divestment campaign" (Schneider, 2014: 611). Indeed, these sorts of regulatory impacts are materially critical to ensuring the removal of fossil fuels. Triggered by Copenhagen's failure to provide meaningful and effective transnational climate policy, after the movement's initiation in 2012 a number of high-profile laws and regulations compensated for what Copenhagen failed to deliver. A prominent catalyst was the Paris Agreement in 2015 which was the first-ever universal, legally binding global climate deal. Indeed, as Al Gore suggests (Vidal and Vaughan, 2015):

> *This universal and ambitious agreement sends a clear signal to governments, businesses, and investors everywhere: the transformation of our global economy from one fuelled by dirty energy to one fuelled by sustainable economic growth is now firmly and inevitably under way.*

The Paris Agreement's pledge entered into legal force in November 2016. This triggered several national laws, for instance in Sweden and France, compelling companies to report on risk exposure due climate change (Neslen, 2017). The fossil fuel divestment campaign in many ways provided the impetus for the creation of some of these national laws. Ireland for instance implemented a law that would see their sovereign wealth fund divested completely from fossil fuels, as one minister commented: "We are going to be selling your Exxon Mobil shares, sir, because we don't believe in the future that you stand for" (Climate Home, 2017).

There have also been several high-profile legal cases involving fossil fuel companies and climate change. Most prominently, several investors have taken legal action against fund managers who continue to invest in fossil fuels for breaching their fiduciary duties. Fossil fuel companies have also directly been taken to court and sued both by private and public actors. ExxonMobil in particular is currently involved in numerous legal investigations regarding climate change by the Securities and Exchanges Commission. As the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL, 2016: 22) suggest, "[these] investigations have arisen in the wake of mounting public evidence that ExxonMobil and other major fossil fuel companies were on notice of the potential for carbon-based fuels to contribute to climate change earlier than widely recognized." In addition, in an unprecedented move in March 2016, 20 state Attorney Generals launched a federal investigation to prosecute ExxonMobil for furthering climate change given "high-funded and morally vacant forces" (Barrett and Philips, 2016). Relatedly, the New York Supreme Court ordered ExxonMobil to comply with a subpoena issued by the New York Attorney General insisting that its auditors, PwC, hand over incriminating documents (Schneiderman, 2017).

Another material impact was that several investor groups brought forward binding shareholder resolutions that were passed at the annual shareholder meetings of major oil and

gas companies (Kavanagh, 2015). These resolutions demanded that fossil fuel companies 'stress test' the extent to which their business model is compatible within the 2°C limit imposed by the Paris Agreement. Although proposing these types of resolutions is not uncommon, usually they are only supported by a small minority of shareholders. However, given the prominence of the global fossil fuel divestment movement, several resolutions were passed by the boards of BP, Statoil, Shell in 2015. In 2016, of the 14 resolutions brought in front of ExxonMobil, eight were directly related to climate change (Rushe, 2017). As one investor group framed it, "Folks perceive them to be a leader in the fight against addressing climate change. They are the face of the anti-climate movement. And I think that's why we see so many resolutions against Exxon" (Hulac, 2016). Some groups which traditionally preferred encouraging fossil fuel companies to adapt to climate change through 'softer' shareholder engagement actions, adopted a more severe divestment approach. The well-regarded environmentalist Jonathon Porritt, who had worked closely with fossil fuel companies for decades to help them develop sustainability programs, also finally departed ways with (what he now referred to as) "hydrocarbon supremacists" (Carrington, 2015b). A big blow to the fossil fuel industry came in early 2016 as the largest non-state-owned coal company, Peabody, filed for bankruptcy, citing in its report to the SEC as one of the reasons for liquidation ensuing regulation as a result of fossil fuel divestment (Readfearn, 2014):

> *Concerns about the environmental impacts of coal combustion, including perceived impacts on global climate issues, are resulting in increased regulation of coal combustion in many jurisdictions, unfavorable lending policies by government-backed lending institutions and development banks toward the financing of new overseas coal-fueled power plants and divestment efforts affecting the investment community, which could significantly affect demand for our products or our securities.*

Although there are many reasons for Peabody's declaration, its continued funding of climate denial groups, coupled with an unwillingness to consider alternative fuels, only exacerbated a lack of investor confidence (Stevens, 2016). Commenting on Peabody's bankruptcy, a climate activist succinctly summed up the situation: "[…] institutions around the world are

divesting from coal companies like Peabody because they see the writing on the wall: the fossil fuel age is coming to an end" (Fossil Free UK, 2016).

Overall, the findings presented above suggest that by engaging in certain practices aimed at stigmatizing the fossil fuel industry, cumulatively and over time, the divestment movement was able to facilitate shifts the framing of the relationship between climate change and the fossil fuel industry. In addition, the global fossil fuel divestment movement also contributed to several material effects that significantly implicates the fossil fuel industry.

7.5.4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to address the question, 'where does stigma come from?' This led us to investigate the intentional efforts of actors who work to produce and diffuse stigma in action. Indeed, examining the genesis of any social construct, especially from the perspective of those actors responsible for its construction, requires examining practices *ex ante*. This perspective has been overlooked by current studies of organizational stigma, which emphasizes stigma *ex post*, or what happens after an organization already has acquired stigma. Conversely, our article paints a somewhat different picture of organizational stigma as is commonly discussed in the literature. Instead of considering how organizations are stigmatized, we focused on how organizations "become" stigmatized. This way, organizational stigma emerges as an ongoing discursive-political struggle that illuminates certain "types of actions or situations that cause or prevent organizational stigmatization" (Devers et al., 2009: 155). We identified two central types of work that activists engage in: meaning work and diffusion work. Whereas meaning work concerns the production of stigma as a vilifying concept, diffusion work involves persuading key evaluators to adopt stigma. Regarding meaning work, we demonstrated two practices—*othering* and *packaging*—that construct certain stigma-categories, labels, and marks, coupled with forming the difference between 'Us' and 'Other'. In terms of diffusion work, we highlighted how stigma was spread among key evaluators by activists enacting certain transmitting practices. This entailed either working *through* already legitimated allies to translate stigma

to align with the interests of key evaluators, or transmitting stigma directly to actors already engaged in disrupting the institution of fossil fuels. In addition, we illustrated how, through these transmitting practices, stigmatizing had both symbolic and material effects. In this vein, we highlighted both how the framing of fossil fuels and climate change shifted over time, and how the global fossil fuel divestment movement acted encouraged legal action against the fossil fuel industry. Based on these insights, we contribute to the literature in four ways.

Stigmatizers at work

First, we place stigmatizing actors center stage by highlighting their reflexive, skilled and strategic ability as they purposively engage in the process of stigmatization. As such, our focus was to examine the often-overlooked work-based practices that activists, both individually and collectively, engage in as they "produce cracks in the foundation of an institution and being to shift what was once taken for granted" (Suddaby et al., 2013: 337). As we discussed earlier, emphasis on 'those who stigmatize' is largely missing from studies of organizational stigma, which focus on stigmatized organizations. Notably, in their seminal piece on organizational stigma Devers et al (2009: 155) stressed that: "the dearth of knowledge regarding stigma origination, leaves us with no cogent theoretical understanding of the processes that drive the formation of an organizational stigma."

We contend that stigma can be used as strategic resource (Hardy et al., 2000b; Oliver, 1991). As stigma may repress vulnerable groups, it may likewise be used productively. In this case, activists knowingly engaged in stigmatization based an understanding of the consequences for those actors targeted by their efforts. As we demonstrated, despite climate activists being aware that financially bankrupting the fossil fuel industry was not feasible, they were explicitly interested in dislocating the fossil fuel industry from its moral foundations. As such, stigma becomes a tool in 'the service of power' (Fairclough, 1995b: 11) as actors utilize its devaluing properties to suppress other actors that pose a threat. Whilst studies of organizational stigma rarely address this strategic aspect of the stigmatization process from the perspective of the stigmatizer, literature on labeling theory and the sociology of deviance

frequently highlights how certain actors use stigmatization to maintain their social position (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1997; Gibbs and Erickson, 1975). In this respect, stigma is imposed by powerful actors on less-powerful groups as a means to ensure the continuation of social order (Parker and Aggleton, 2003). As such, whilst stigma can be deeply devaluating for those being stigmatized, stigma can also be especially valuable for those doing the stigmatizing. To our knowledge, few studies of organizational stigma have engaged with this actor-centric analysis (Hudson, 2008), despite several calls to explicitly examine "agentic approaches" (Helms and Patterson, 2014: 1481).

It is important to mention that stigmatizers in this case were not powerholders. This is somewhat unusual because stigmatizing usually occurs when a powerful group stigmatizes an already marginalized group (Mishina and Devers, 2012). Climate activists instead acted to use stigma as an *empowerment* tool. Stigma was used as a weapon aimed at disrupting the institution of fossil fuels, or as a "direct assault on the validity of a long-standing tradition or established activity" (Oliver, 1992: 567). We showed how, for instance, climate activists were able to diffuse stigma among key evaluators by working through allies – stigma travelled covertly in some cases. Climate activists are thus "not a powerful or culturally sophisticated actor, but one capable of working in highly original and potentially counter-cultural ways" (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006: 238).

Attaining a critical mass

The second contribution regards practices involved in acquiring a critical mass needed for stigma to spread across a context and become self-sustaining. Indeed, the literature theorizes certain factors that increase the likelihood that a critical mass reaches its 'tipping point', such as whether stigma claims resonate with groups existing within cultural frames, or the status of the stigmatizer (Devers et al., 2009; Roulet, 2015). But this poses a problem regarding the efforts of climate activists given their lack of status and the contrast that exists between their often-radical claims and the more conservative 'macroculture' of key evaluators such as financial and regulatory actors. Activists thus resorted to alternative means to access key

evaluators. Importantly, activists endeavored to influence those evaluators that would more likely result in the fossil fuel industry becoming stigmatized. In other words, these key evaluators held power to influence validation institutions such as the media, state, and law (Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine and Haack, 2015). This diverges somewhat from previous studies of organizational stigma, which, for the most part, attribute a critical mass to a collectively held judgment of a group of stakeholders (Devers et al., 2009). Thereby studies often sideline that critical mass is dependent on relative power positions of those 'doing' the stigmatizing.

In this case, we illustrated how the 'power to stigmatize' (Link and Phelan, 2001: 375) is appropriated from key evaluators instead of necessarily possessed by climate activists themselves. We detailed how this process unfolds by engaging in certain transmitting practices (Figure 13). In this regard, we show how stigma is diffused to key evaluators either directly, or through an indirect transmitting practice whereby allied actors assist in diffusing stigma. As increasingly more key evaluators assume this now 'translated' stigma concept, it legitimates activists' stigma work as they claim endorsement from key evaluators, which, in turn, becomes noticed by other key evaluators. This a cycle of diffusion results in an almost autonomous diffusion process; stigma starts to self-travel which, in some cases, occurs covertly as actors infect each other without necessarily being aware of stigma's presence. This was all largely made possible by stigma drifting 'under the radar' – as financial mechanism, or divestment. Nevertheless, to do so, stigmatizing required two types of work – meaning work was used to produce stigma as a concept, and diffusion work facilitated influencing key evaluators.

This suggests that stigma emergence is not a matter of single or even multiple actor efforts but *relational* meaning-making and distributed agency, of actors that might not traditionally relate to one another (Garud et al., 2010; Quack, 2007). We therefore contend that stigma diffusion relies largely on influencing actors that were *least* likely to adopt a stigma discourse. Thereby, other evaluators take notice and collectively "idealize the organization as the antithesis of everything the stakeholder group values" (Devers et al., 2009: 162).

Our understanding of 'diffusion work' was inspired by studies of organizational legitimacy that adopt an evaluators perspective (Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine and Haack, 2015). We were therefore able to place a significant emphasis on the political dynamics that occur between activists, allies and key evaluators. Notwithstanding, despite the apparent differences between these actors there exists an implicit 'channel' that allows stigma to be negotiated between actors. This distributed agency that actors exhibit operates on a supra-individual level as the accumulated micro-practices of multiple actors collectively shape institutions. Accordingly, as Lawrence and Suddaby (2006: 217) assert, "that the creation of new institutions requires institutional work on the part of a wide range of actors, both those with the resources and skills to act as entrepreneurs and those whose role is supportive or facilitative of the entrepreneurs." It is important to mention that both types of work discussed above are not independent of each other; they are, instead, mutually reinforcing. On the one hand, without stigma being formed it would lack any meaningful coherence and represent only a set of disparate attributes. On the other, if there is no diffusion of stigma among key evaluators its significance would rest only in the perceptions of individuals.

Stigma as a product of discourse

Our third contribution concerns the constitutive role of discourse with regard to stigma emergence. We adopted an explicit emphasis on texts given the important role that language plays in the social construction of reality (Phillips and Malhotra, 2008), coupled with the salience of symbolic action required to stigmatize (Hardy et al., 2000b). As we discussed previously, although several noteworthy attempts exist that address origins of stigma, these studies usually consider discursive practices implicitly; frequently assuming a straightforward association process where a target subject is 'linked' with a pejorative label (Roulet, 2014). Whilst such insights are important, they gloss over that actors must 'do something' for association processes to occur. We accordingly foregrounded the micro-level dynamics of activists' text and talk as they purposively aim to stigmatize, including the material affects thereof.

We for example highlighted how actors engage in meaning work to produce the various symbolic-discursive cues that constitute the content of a stigma discourse. This included 'marking' micro-dynamics as activists branded some fossil fuel companies with the distinctive 'X' symbol, to visually scar targeted subjects. Marking is eerily similar to how, in ancient Greece, slaves, criminals, and prostitutes were physically branded by an authority "to represent their inferior moral status and to signify that contact with them should be avoided" (Devers et al., 2009: 158; Papadopoulos, 2000). The 'marks of stigma' not only play a key role within the work of Goffman (1963), but are well referenced in the sociology of deviance literature, for instance, as drug users carry scars at the location of injection or as victims of domestic violence are stigmatized due to the bruises they carry (Sirey et al., 2001). Some organizational stigma studies reference this practice of marking, albeit without much in-depth analysis – for example, Tracey and Phillips (2015: 748) in their account of a social enterprise in the East of England show how stigma was transferred onto the organization given their association with migrants, thereby "'marking' it in the eyes of parts of the British population." We further buttressed the role of discourse by illustrating how climate activists constructed the difference between the evil 'Other' and the good 'Us'; repeatedly emphasizing that the latter should create significant distance and even completely severe ties with the former. Activists also utilized discourse to construct various stigma categories (death-based stigma, immorality-based stigma and ignorance-based stigma) by grouping together negative associations, which were then linked to corresponding stereotypes (merchants of death, human rights abusers, outlaws, stupid).

Discourse is therefore crucial in constructing the 'building blocks' needed for actors to engage in stigmatizing (e.g., Parker and Aggleton, 2003; Smith, 2007). Discursive activity is formative in the sense that it infuses objects with meaning that is particularly negative, which later functions to devalue targeted subjects such as an organization. For example, consider how activist use vivid imagery to depict coal's suffocating darkness, or how an emotional response is evoked through the use of narratives such as comparing fossil fuel companies to

the racist apartheid regime of South Africa. We consider these discursive mechanisms essential in arousing the sort of pejorative reactions expected from attempts to stigmatize, including, amongst others, disgust (see Voronov and Vince, 2012). As such, given that we examine stigmatization in-action, as opposed to after the fact, our discursive approach to stigmatization provides a more fine-grained understanding of the meaning-making required for organizational stigma to emerge.

7.5.5. Conclusion

Overall, our study demonstrates that organizational stigma does not 'just appear', but that stigmatizing organizations requires purposive, reflexive and skilled work of actors that hope to gain from the results of their stigma work. We highlighted how this occurred as climate activists—believing that burning fossil fuels is immoral and poses a serious threat to the Planet's sustainability—engaged in the stigmatization of those companies who actively facilitate a fossil fuel addiction. However, it was not climate activists who were responsible for stigmatizing the fossil fuel industry. Rather, we showed how organizations became stigmatized by certain 'key evaluators'. Climate activists knowingly endeavored to encourage key evaluators to join their stigmatizing project by engaging in two types of institutional work—'meaning work' and 'diffusion work'—as illustrated in our process model of organizational stigmatization. This article's main argument was that climate activists (on a micro level), and key evaluators (on a macro level) worked together, albeit not always directly, to stigmatize the fossil fuel industry; organizational stigma is thus organized *relationally*. Thereby, key evaluators who had the resources and credibility to stigmatize were thus influential in conferring stigma onto organizations associated with fossil fuels. Nevertheless, as demonstrated in this article, the power rest in the actions of individuals with the ability 'to do otherwise' which may be one of the final sources of hope to address the 'grand challenge' of climate change.

CHAPTER 8 – CONCLUSION

The world will not evolve past its current state of crisis by using the same thinking that created the situation.
Albert Einstein

The overarching objective of this thesis was to explore how the business-nature relationship is constituted by discursive struggles surrounding the global ecological crisis, unfolding across multiple spatial and temporal dimensions. Through a multi-level, multi-method study that considered various time periods, this thesis demonstrated how organizational representations of the natural environment produce conflicting discourses around an ensuing ecological crisis within the context of global environmental governance (Levy and Newell, 2005). The four articles in this thesis identified several discursive practices (summarized in the next section) that facilitated and, in some cases, hindered organizations' struggle over meanings surrounding the ecological crisis. The articles also showed how, by enacting these practices, organizations (re)constituted their relationship with the natural environmental along the same lines of thinking that caused the ecological crisis in the first place – more technology, more economic growth, and more market-based solutions (Wright and Nyberg, 2015a). This is concerning given, as argued in Section 8.4, the path dependent trajectory through which discourses have become entangled over time, fostering what I contend is a social-symbolic deadlock whereby, paradoxically, attempts to solve the ecological crisis only entrenches organizations further into the crisis.

This concluding chapter first provides a summary of the thesis' main findings, including reflecting on the primary research objective and the two sub-questions. Next, I elaborate on each article's specific contribution, followed by a more general discussion of the thesis' overarching contribution with respect to the literature on organizations and the natural environment. I then discuss the implications of my study both for scholars interested in the business-nature-society nexus and, on a more practical level, regarding the global ecological crisis in light of a social-symbolic deadlock. Lastly, I review opportunities for future research.

8.1. Summary

Despite the organization-nature relationship featuring increasingly within management and organization research, many studies fail to step outside the narrowly defined confines of organizational life to consider how macro-level discourses are constituted (Bansal and Hoffman, 2012; Hahn, Figge, et al., 2015; Hart and Dowell, 2011; Porter and Kramer, 2011). As such, extant research tends to reproduce an understanding of organizations and the natural environment based on preexisting organizational realities (Banerjee, 2003; Crane, 2000; Macnaghten and Urry, 1998b). The four articles in this thesis highlight how current scholarly approaches that address the business-nature relationship—broadly characterized in Chapter 5 as encompassing three conversations—do not fully consider the embeddedness of organizations within social-political, economic and ecological systems and operating across spatial and temporal scales (Williams et al., 2017).

On the whole, this thesis theorizes the business-nature relationship as discursively organized outside the organization. A multi-level, multi-method approach was adopted (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Phillips and Oswick, 2012; Starik and Rands, 1995), which was useful to, as discussed in Chapter 6: explicitly envelop several actor voices; operate across multiple temporal and spatial dimensions; and emphasize multiple levels of analysis. Organizational discourses in the form of corporate reports, CEO speeches, policy documents, civil society texts were analyzed, coupled with news articles from mainstream news media and social media posts. The aim was to consider how the production of these texts, despite being produced independently from each other on different levels, collectively construct a contiguous arrangement of different types of 'talk' regarding the global ecological crisis. Hence, whilst I appreciated their heterogeneity, I also recognized how different types of talk are interconnected and thereby co-constitute one another (Barry et al., 2006).

The fossil fuel industry was foregrounded given its current role within global environmental governance, as the 'villain' of the global ecological crisis (Hulme, 2009; Mckibben, 2012). Whilst demand continues to motivate the extraction, production, and marketing of fossil

fuels (IEA, 2016), the industry is plagued both by the serious risk of regulatory—and by implication financial—constraints related to the natural environment (Stevens, 2016), and by legitimacy threats given that the fossil fuel industry profits from a product that fuels the global ecological crisis (van Halderen et al., 2016). Whilst the fossil fuel industry's involvement as a key contributor to global environmental governance was a focal point in this thesis, other organizations, some of which lacked "the right to speak" (Phillips and Hardy, 2002) such as climate activists (Article IV) and environmental NGOs (Article I), were considered as they implicate, and are implicated by, the discursive practices of the fossil fuel industry.

In terms of the theoretical positioning of this thesis, in contrast to a 'nature as real' perspective often assumed by natural scientists studying the human-induced causes of the global ecological crisis (Steffen et al., 2015), this thesis adopted a 'nature as constructed' perspective (see Section 3.1) in seeking to incorporate issues of culture and power with the construction of nature in crisis (Escobar et al., 1999; Hajer, 1997). As such, throughout the four articles, I drew on a poststructuralist understanding of discourse as discussed in Section 3.2, inspired by the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1991) and Foucault (1980, 1989), as well as a post-Marxist interpretation of discourse commonly used in organization studies (Hardy and Phillips, 1999; Mumby, 2004). Subsequently, as discussed in Section 3.3, I applied this theoretical understating of discourse to the social object 'organization'. In this regard, I drew from the concept of organizational symbolism as situated within the linguistic turn in organization studies (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000), arguing not only that organizations are constituted by discourse, but that the relationship between organizations and the natural environment is dependent on the (mis)representation of nature through organizational discourses (Livesey, 2002c; Tregidga, 2007; Tregidga et al., 2013). Therefore, this thesis was underpinned by (1) problematizing any sort of 'natural' relationship between organizations and the natural environment; (2) detailing the discursive practices that construct this 'naturalness'; and (3) demonstrating how certain organizational representations of the

natural environment are privileged, at the expense of other emancipatory discourses that threaten the status quo (Calás and Smircich, 1999; Mumby, 2004).

The first article concerned 'macro talk' and, operating on the field level (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012), explored how a dominant understanding of business' role in sustainable development was constituted over the three UN Earth Summits in 1992, 2002, and 2012. The findings of this article demonstrated that business was not only able to establish its agenda setting privilege since the first Earth Summit in Rio, but crucially that it did so by gradually building coalitions with mainstream civil society and policy actors. The second article regarded 'corporate talk' and, this time on an organizational level, examined how tensions between economic growth and environmental protection were avoided by the three European supermajors—BP, Shell and Total—through corporate mythmaking (Boje et al., 1982; Brown, 1994; Filby and Willmott, 1988; Wright and Nyberg, 2014b). The main finding here was that organizations, by enacting certain defensive responses to climate change, reproduced a self-referential myopia that limited their ability to imagine alternatives to fossil fuels. The third article, also concerning 'corporate talk', investigated the discursive practices through which BP rebuilt a collapsed hegemonic structure (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). This article illustrated how corporate inaction on climate change may be due to organizations ascribing to an identity that they themselves construct. The fourth article included micro-level dynamics and emphasized 'resistance talk', focusing on how climate activists, as part of the global fossil fuel divestment movement, engaged in the stigmatization of the fossil fuel industry (Devers et al., 2009; Lawrence et al., 2013). This article demonstrated that organizations become stigmatized as a result of a relational process that occurs between actors using stigma to disrupt a particular institution and powerholders that have the resources to confer stigma on a macro level. In all, these studies together show how disparate organizations cooperate and compete to find commonalities that allow multiple realities to co-exist, without forgoing individual differences between organizations. However, as I discuss in detail in Section 8.4, whilst these shared meanings may persist, over time they

constitute a socio-symbolic deadlock which is not only unproductive for organizations, but unsustainable for the Planet.

8.2. Addressing the research questions

As noted, the overall objective of this thesis was to explore how the business-nature relationship is constituted by discursive struggles surrounding the global ecological crisis. Two further questions were posed: (a) what are the specific discursive practices that facilitate and/or hinder struggles over the ecological crisis; and (b) what are the power effects of enacting these practices? Below I elaborate on how each article addressed these two sub-questions.

8.2.1. Discursive practices

Identifying discursive practices involved drawing on organizational disclosures about the global ecological crisis. The types of text and talk employed included, as noted: corporate reports; books published by key figures; CEO speak; press releases; internal documents; online media post (often through Twitter); and contributions within the popular press. The production, dissemination and consumption of these texts, taken together, tended to operate to forge common interests, and, in doing so, obfuscate power relations (Levy and Egan, 2003; Nyberg et al., 2013; Wittneben et al., 2010).

Article I emphasized certain discursive practices that resulted in the forming of a discourse coalition (Hajer, 1997), which brought together multiple, competing 'storylines' and organized these around unifying interests (see also Lefsrud and Meyer, 2012; Meyer and Höllerer, 2010). An alliance of business organizations which produced several seminal books on the role of business in sustainable development – e.g., *Walking the Talk: The Business Case for Sustainable Development* (2002), which was co-authored by Chad Holliday (CEO of Du Pont), Stephan Schmidheiny (Chairman of Eternit Group), and Philip Watts (Chairman, Royal Dutch Shell) – was crucial to the forming of this discourse coalition. These publications were strategically distributed before the Earth Summits. Hence, these texts were arguably

used 'weapons' (MacKay and Munro, 2012) to shift the meanings of business' role in sustainable development. In Article II the main discursive practice was organizational mythmaking, used by the European oil and gas supermajors as a means to avoid sustainability tensions. Article II further identified two functions operating as part of this practice: *anchoring* and *transferring*. Whereas anchoring facilitated the supermajors' regression to the comforts of past habits, transferring shifted responsibility for addressing climate change to external actors. Article III was concerned with the rebuilding of a collapsed fossil fuels hegemony, which primarily involved attempts to forge a new identity around the notion of 'climate governance'. The main practice in this case was the articulation of certain signifying chains; conceptualized by Laclau and Mouffe (2001) as a process whereby a collective identity subverts the differences amongst other terms within the signifying chain and 'empties' itself to stand in as a universal embodiment of the entire chain. Lastly, in Article IV, an institutional work perspective was utilized to explore how organizations become stigmatized. In this article, three practices were identified. 'Othering' and 'packaging' were used to construct stigma as a vilifying concept, which produced in-group and outgroup differences, stigma categories, labels and marks. 'Transmitting' practices were used to either directly or indirectly diffuse stigma amongst influential actors. These practices were used to "bring stigma into being" (Heritage, 1984).

8.2.2. (Ideological) effects

The effects of enacting these discourses—i.e., what happens to social relations when discourses are consumed (Purvis and Hunt, 1993)—varied amongst the articles. This ranged from a generally repressive effect, whereby dominant discourses marginalized challenging/resistant discourses (Keenoy et al., 1997; Mumby and Stohl, 1991), to more productive effects whereby discourses facilitated infrastructure needed to create shared meaning (Hajer, 2005). Similar to the discursive practices described above, discourses usually functioned as *both* repressive and productive.

In Article I, the discourse coalition that formed functioned both to conceal (i.e., repress) contradictions underpinning the relationship between organizations and the natural environment, and to act as a tool to acquire legitimacy from other field members (Meyer and Höllerer, 2010). Nevertheless, the coalition was also 'productive' as it provided a common language which facilitated the engagement of disparate actors. Thereby, actors could maintain their distinctiveness, without forgoing a shared understanding of environmental issues (Hajer, 1997; Lefsrud and Meyer, 2012; Torfing, 2005). Article II emphasized the repressive effects of organizational mythmaking as a discursive practice (Barthes, 1972; Filby and Willmott, 1988). As illustrated, mythmaking practices of the European oil and gas supermajors obfuscated sustainability tensions by constructing certain defensive responses: (i) *regression*, or retreating to the comforts of past familiarities; (ii) *fantasy*, or escaping the harsh reality that fossil fuels and climate change are indeed irreconcilable; and (iii) *projecting*, or blaming external actors for failing to address climate change. The effect of these defensive responses was that the European oil and gas supermajors themselves determined both their inability and unwillingness to address the complexities of climate change substantively. Article III specifically focused on BP, proposing that by rearticulating a hegemonic structure through the process of metaphorization, the resulting empty signifier—'climate governance'—constituted a fantasy 'lock-in', satisfying BP's omnipotent desire for control over nature, whilst repressing the BP's realization that it was in fact impotent in addressing climate change (Kersten, 2007; Stavrakakis, 1997a). In this case, similar to Article I, the discursive effect was concurrently repressive and productive. Lastly, Article IV stressed mostly productive effects. Stigma was used as a weapon aimed at disrupting the institution of fossil fuels and, in doing so, created new meanings surrounding the relationship between fossil fuel companies and climate change. Climate activists, in this respect, used the discourses they constructed as a means of empowerment and to further their own ideological project (Mishina and Devers, 2012).

In all, the four studies together illustrate the concurrent repressive and productive effects of enacting discursive practices; either to maintain a discursive order (see Section 3.2.5), or to disrupt this order by enacting resistant discursive practices as was demonstrated in Article IV. On the whole, the ideological effect is to maintain a status quo whereby fossil fuel companies appear to be acting as change agents in the fight against ecological disaster, whilst concurrently continuing 'business as usual' (Banerjee, 2008; Livesey, 2002a; Tregidga et al., 2015). Resistant actors, successful to some degree in effecting change, risk becoming enveloped in this discursive construction through the formation of discourse coalitions (Article I), though as Article IV shows, the emancipatory project has hope as activist use discourse of fossil fuel companies against them (see also Birke and Böhm, 2006).

8.3. Contributions

This thesis makes two types of contribution. The first pertains to specific conversations addressed in each of the four articles. These are tailored to the fit with intended publication outlets and therefore address a niche 'gap' that has been carefully crafted for a specific journal (see Table 1 in Section 7.1 for publication outlets of each article). The second regards the 'thesis of this thesis', the overarching contribution that operates across conversations within the organizations and the natural environment literature.

8.3.1. Article specific contributions

Each article presented in this thesis, though forming part of a central aim, spoke to a specific 'conversation' within the field of organizations and the natural environment (see Chapter 5 for overview). Contributions usually vary in terms of using the context of organizations and the natural environment to explore organizational phenomena (e.g., organizational stigma in Article IV), or using organizational concepts (e.g., paradox theory in Article II) to examine issues surrounding the natural environment. I will now address the contribution of each article both generally and in the context of the conversation to which I intended to contribute.

8.3.1.1. Broadening the discursive field

Article I was situated within the extant conversation that critically examines corporate disclosures regarding sustainable development (Livesey, 2002; Springett, 2003; Tregidga et al., 2015). In this vein, scholars propose that the way corporations interpret sustainable development—i.e., as a commercial opportunity or potential business threat—results in sustainable development being defined through a business logic (Livesey and Kearins, 2002; Springett, 2013). This way, corporations construct their own role in sustainable development based on a narrow conceptualization of nature that reproduces business-as-usual. This literature was problematized for assuming that the business-natural environment was constructed by business disclosures alone, without considering other actors that form part of the meaning-making process regarding sustainable development (Dodds et al., 2014; Hajer and Versteeg, 2005) . To address this oversight, Article I considered certain 'non-business' voices such as policy makers and NGOs, adopting Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) concept of strategic action fields to account for the political contestation that occurred amongst actors surrounding the UN Earth Summits . Thereby, this article attempted to answer Tregidga et al's (2015: 6) call for researchers to "move away from understanding what [SD] means to business, to understanding how those understandings came to be, why they are not inevitable, and how they could be different." The main contribution thus was that the study *expanded the field of discursivity* to consider the how multiple actors both compete and cooperate to secure definitional control of business' role in SD.

8.3.1.2. 'Dark side' of avoiding sustainability tensions

Article II problematized the literature that addresses a "paradox approach" or "integrative view" on corporate (Gao and Bansal, 2013; Hahn et al., 2015). The main contribution of this article was the identification of specific defensive dynamics through which organizations avoid sustainability tensions, and the effects therein. Scholars drawing from paradox theory often suggest that instead of ignoring tensions between economic, social, and environmental dimensions, organizations must embrace these often-contradictory demands simultaneously

(for an overview see Van der Byl and Slawinski, 2015). However, this literature is particularly focused on the 'productive' side of confronting tensions, paradoxes and contradictions (Smith and Lewis, 2011), and as such is less concerned with how tensions can be managed in an unproductive manner by avoiding them all together (Vince and Broussine, 1996). This article addressed this gap by drawing from the concept of organizational mythmaking (Boje et al., 1982; Brown, 1994; Filby and Willmott, 1988; Wright and Nyberg, 2014b). Thereby, Article II illustrated a potential 'dark side' of how sustainability tensions can be obfuscated by enacting certain myths about the business-nature relationship.

8.3.1.3. Inaction on climate change as identity

Article III explored why organizations fail to substantively respond to climate change (Wright and Nyberg, 2015). This article's main contribution was to identify the processes by which corporate inaction on climate change is articulated and performed as an identity. Literature on organizations and the natural environment that addresses corporate (in)action on climate change generally emphasizes how inaction is facilitated due dynamics internal to the organization (Hoffman, 2005; Lash and Wellington, 2007; Lee and Klassen, 2015). Here, institutionalized aspects of organizational life, such as risk management practices (Nyberg and Wright, 2015) or short-termism (Slawinski et al., 2015), are unable to deal with the complexities posed by climate change. However, this article proposed that it is not so much about how the organization functions internally, but how it constructs its identity in relation to broader developments that unfold within the context of global environmental governance. To address this, the article utilized Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) discourse theory to illustrate how BP rebuilt a hegemonic fossil fuels discourse—and in doing so its identity—through ongoing processes of articulation (Birke and Böhm, 2006; Contu, 2002; Contu et al., 2013; O'Doherty, 2015; Spicer and Sewell, 2010; van Bommel and Spicer, 2011; Willmott, 2005).

8.3.1.4. Micro-practices of stigmatization

Article IV was nestled somewhat outside the literature on organizations and the natural environment and focused on the ongoing conversation regarding organizational stigma (Devers et al., 2009; Hampel and Tracey, 2016). In this case, struggles over the natural environment were used as a context, as opposed to concept (as was the case with the previous three articles). Article IV suggested that, whilst management and organization scholars have addressed how stigma may be appropriately managed (Hudson, 2008; Hudson and Okhuysen, 2009), few attempts had been made to examine where organizational stigma comes from in the first place despite several calls within the literature (Helms and Patterson, 2014). As such, this article explored the 'origins' of organizational stigma by adopting an institutional work perspective (Lawrence, R. Suddaby, et al., 2009), to examine the micro-practices of climate activists as they aim to stigmatize the fossil fuel industry given its ties to climate change (Ansar et al., 2013). Accordingly, this article contributes to the literature on organizational stigma by proposing a dynamic process model of stigma work that details the micro-level practices of stigmatization.

8.3.2. Overarching contribution

Instead of solely emphasizing the organizational level that is, by implication, detached from broader macro level arrangements, this thesis both considered environmental issues as constructed by micro level practices and in terms of their broader function within the macro level context of global environmental governance (Levy and Newell, 2005). Whilst the literature on organizations and the natural environment focuses mainly on firm-centric perspectives (Porter and van der Linde, 1995; Hoffman and Ventresca, 1999; Lounsbury, Fairclough, and Paul Lee, 2012), this thesis's main contribution is the analysis of the organization-nature relationship as embedded within broader struggles that operate between organizations and across multiple levels. Indeed, few studies approach the business-natural environment from the perspective of interconnected spatial and temporal dimensions (Gladwin et al., 1995; Marcus et al., 2010; Starik and Rands, 1995; Williams et al., 2017). A

multi-level, multi-method approach was utilized in this respect to conceptualize how organizations, despite differing in terms of organizational type, co-construct discourses regarding the ecological crisis through definitional contests across multiple levels (Barry et al., 2006; Hardy and Phillips, 1999; Mumby, 2004, 2013; Phillips and Oswick, 2012). By emphasizing that relationship between organizations and the natural environment is constructed across spatial and temporal dimensions (Williams et al., 2017), the articles presented in this thesis illustrate that corporate engagement with the natural environment is not restricted to isolated case-specific instances, as is common with most literature within the business-as-little-less-than-usual conversation (Bansal and Gao, 2006; Hoffman, 1999; Jennings and Zandbergen, 1995). Based on this systems perspective, this thesis suggests that corporate inaction on environmental issues such as climate change is partly due to the way these systems become enmeshed in a social-symbolic deadlock, the implications of which are discussed in the next section (8.4.1).

There have been several calls within the literature on organizations and the natural environment to reconsider using traditional organization and management theory to explore large-scale environmental issues (Hahn, et al., 2015; Tregidga et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2013). Accordingly, the deteriorating Earth system, which likewise cannot be contained within a specific location, is multi-dimensional and dynamic (Steffen et al., 2015). Though this thesis did not apply a specific systems theory, and could not consider the interconnectedness of *all* systems involved in the construction of the global ecological crisis, it highlighted how the relationship between organizations and the natural environment became defined by political, socio-cultural, and economic systems (Levy and Lichtenstein, 2011). This was further reflected by the interconnectedness of discourses and texts evidenced across the four articles that considered multiple actor voices in the construction of discourses of the ecological crisis. Indeed, as emphasized specifically in Section 3.2 on discourse theory and in Articles I and III, enveloping disparate voices was central to understanding how discourses are produced relationally, a contribution of this study.

Whilst the literature on organizations and the natural environment does not necessarily neglect the 'struggle' aspect of discourse theory (e.g., Barros, 2014; Hardy and Phillips, 1999), studies often analyze these contests from a narrowly defined context considering moments in which actors engage in direct dialogue, rather than taking a discourse perspective (Joutsenvirta and Vaara, 2015). The array of actor voices analyzed in this thesis—whether business, policy or environmentalist—were considered as forming part of a broader discursive network. Indeed, this way, certain 'silenced' voices were included – notably the voices of environmentalist NGOs (Article I) at the Earth Summits and climate activists (Article IV). Whilst literature concerning organizations and the natural environment does include these voices (Pinkse and Kolk, 2012), few studies explore the reasons for their silencing within extra-organizational systems. Thereby, this thesis demonstrated how, for example, spaces designed to give voice to marginalized actors such as the UN Earth Summits (Article I) or through the practice of fossil fuel divestment (Article II), ironically stifled the radical-ness of some organizations (Springett, 2013).

Given the systems perspective taken in this thesis, voices were abstracted from their localized contexts and considered in terms of interdiscursivity, or interplay between different practices and discourses that re-actualize one another irrespective of whether the links between these actors were physically visible (Fairclough, 1995a; Livesey, 2002a; van Dijk, 2011). As mentioned, each article accounted for a certain voice within the context of global environmental governance: Article I represented 'macro-talk'; Articles II and III represented 'corporate talk'; and Article IV represented 'resistance talk'. This demonstrated not only several overlapping discursive constructions across the articles (e.g., technocentrism, capitalism, environmentalism etc.), but also how certain texts are cross referenced by other texts, thereby highlighting "texts that leave traces" (Phillips et al., 2004: 640). Next, I provide an overview of how a multi-level, multi-method approach was utilized in relation to this thesis' contribution to the literature on organizations and the natural environment, reflecting on each article.

Article I explicitly addressed how organizations are embedded within broader discursive struggles regarding the natural environment that transcend both national borders and organizational boundaries. Here, the UN Earth Summits provided a unique discursive space where organizations meet every decade to battle for definitional control of what SD means for business, and what business means for SD (Lafferty and Eckerberg, 2013). This article drew from the concept fields, which refer to socially constructed arenas where actors with varying interests and resource endowments vie for a dominant power position (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). However, it is important to mention that a macro-systems perspective should not be confused with the concept of organizational fields, which accounts for the space in-between the firm level and social structures. The main difference here is that whilst some fields operate at a quasi-macro level, e.g., global environmental governance, a systems perspective proposes that fields must be considered vis-à-vis other fields in terms of their interconnectedness, and regarding these fields' embeddedness within other social, ecological and economic systems (Marcus et al., 2010). This is of course problematic because organizational fields, by definition, have boundaries that remain loosely arranged around certain aspects of institutional life (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Lounsbury et al., 2003). The way these boundaries are expanded was discussed in Article I. I suggested that organizational fields, whilst useful for understanding how organizational life is shaped by shifting field dynamics, must be considered within the context of broader systems to appreciate the complexity by which large-scale environmental issues manifest. For instance, to understand the field dynamics that were emphasized in Article I, it was necessary to consider why corporations attend the Earth Summits. To do so, I considered the organizational level in Articles II and III. I considered how specific actors—all of which were present at the Earth Summits—engaged in the construction and maintenance of an energy system, in this case related to fossil fuels (Levy and Egan, 2003). Both articles identified different discursive practices that the three European oil and gas supermajors enacted in response to threats posed by climate change. Article II for instance suggested that upon enacting these discursive

practices, the supermajors were increasingly entrenched in a mindset that promoted the same thinking (more consumption, more technology, and more economic growth) that caused climate change in the first place. Similarly, Article III highlighted how corporate inaction climate change is fostered as organizations as construct an identity that self-legitimates inertia.

These accounts provided an alternative understanding of why resource-intensive corporations were invested in attaining definitional control of the global ecological crisis. In this respect, it became evident that these fossil fuels companies were themselves in a period of crisis – an identity crisis of sorts (Tregidga et al., 2014). Both Articles II and III stressed how fossil fuel companies enacted various practices that repressed the inevitability of confronting the threat of climate change. This contrasts the current literature's conceptualization of fossil fuel companies as hyper-muscular powerholders that stabilize a fossil fuel energy system (Jones and Levy, 2007; Kolk and Levy, 2001). Instead, this thesis shows how firms are in a constant struggle to piece together a shattered system that is under constant attack. This finding places Article I in a new light where the presence of fossil fuel companies at the UN Earth Summits may be as much about lobbying against regulation as it is a sense-making endeavor to 'find' a purpose within evolving social, economic, and energy systems. In this light, Article IV considered the 'resistant talk' of climate activists. These actors are a crucial grassroots force that challenges the hegemony of fossil fuels. Despite having already considered environmentalist groups in Articles I and III, in this case, the analysis was focused on micro-practices enacted to stigmatize the fossil fuel industry. Again, although this study in isolation does not necessarily engage dialogically with, for instance, the CEOs of the European oil and gas supermajors, there are interdiscursive elements that mutually constitute the global ecological crisis. For example, both cases drew from discourses surrounding financial markets and technology and thereby established interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 1995b).

This highlights how a multi-system, multi-method approach (Phillips and Oswick, 2012)is useful for research regarding the political construction of business-nature relations: whilst environmentalist NGOs and fossil fuel executives rarely speak to one another publically on joint platforms (for exception see Article I regarding BP, Greenpeace and WBCSD), both groups have a significant impact on discourses of the global ecological crisis. Therefore, a key contribution of this thesis was the illustration of how actors speak through discourses, thereby reaching other actors that are implicated by those discourses. Conversely these discourses also "speak back" by shaping those actors who ascribe to those discourses (for example by through acquired subject positions, or as was the case in Article IV through endorsing the global fossil fuel divestment movement). The key contribution, when taking the findings of the articles together, is the emergence of a socio-symbolic deadlock, which explains how organizations are embedded within interlocking 'systems with systems' that reproduce corporate inaction on climate change. This will be further discussed in the next section in terms of theoretical and practical implications.

8.4. Implications

The contributions discussed above regarding the literature on organizations and the natural environment have wider implications both for theory and practice, which are detailed in this section. I first discuss how, given examples from the articles presented in this thesis, struggles surrounding the global ecological crisis have resulted in a dangerous "social-symbolic deadlock." I then use this concept to frame both the theoretical and practical implications of this thesis, including how theory and practice may transcend the deadlock. As I discuss below, conceptualizing the social-symbolic deadlock was inspired by Unruh's (2000) notion of a 'carbon lock in'. However, whereas Unruh (2000), as well as many other systems theories, usually focus on complex socio-material networks (e.g., Cilliers, 1998; Levy and Lichtenstein, 2011; Seto et al., 2016), a social-symbolic deadlock emphasizes interlocking *discursive* arrangements produced by social practices, human cognition, and other affective processes.

8.4.1. Social-symbolic deadlock

As illustrated by this thesis, global environmental governance has reached an impasse; it has stopped producing new modes of governance and instead recycles capitalist modes of production to address the global ecological crisis (Hooks, 2005; Iguchi, 2015; Levy and Egan, 2003; Wright and Nyberg, 2015a). A social-symbolic deadlock has emerged given the way political actors—which include businesses (see Chapter 4)—have depoliticized discourses of the ecological crisis. Conflicting social-political, economic, and ideological elements, are all organized around a 'common interest'—i.e., human progress and prosperity—that not only conceals the contradiction between elements, but, in doing so, legitimates corporate inaction on global environmental issues (e.g., Cox, 1983). Hence, inertia is a defining characteristic of global environmental governance because challenging agreed-upon approaches to address the ecological crisis is to defy the common interest of global environmental governance. Large-scale interventions are unlikely since actors within global environmental governance apparently stand 'in agreement' (Bulkeley and Mol, 2003; Lorenzoni and Benson, 2014; Parks and Roberts, 2010).

A deadlock position underscores the reactionary modus operandi of global environmental governance, which is increasingly void of contestation. In this respect, Swyngedouw (2011b: 77) suggests that global environmental governance has facilitated a 'post-political consensus', which:

> *[…] forestalls the articulation of divergent, conflicting, and alternative trajectories of future environmental possibilities and assemblages. There is no contestation over the givens of the situation, over the partition of the sensible; there is only debate over the technologies of management, the timing of their implementation, the arrangements of policing, and the interests of those whose stake is already acknowledged, whose voice is recognized as legitimate.*

I do not necessarily wish to suggest that this dilemma will never be resolved. I agree in this respect with Laclau and Mouffe (2001) that *the discursive* is in a constant state of flux and always under threat of being overthrown by that which the discourse excludes, or the 'other'

(see Section 7.4.4 in Article III). Nevertheless, reflecting on the findings of this thesis suggests that its resolution (whenever that may be) is unlikely to result from autonomous decisions made by players within the global environmental governance regime. Hence, considering the deteriorating state of the Earth system, a deadlock may be particularly problematic. Drawing on the findings of this thesis, I argue that there are two main reasons for the emergence of a social-symbolic deadlock: (1) contradictory elements mutually constituting each other; and (2) the path-dependent trajectory by which the ecological crisis has been articulated over time.

First, given its current arrangement, a unifying discourse of the global ecological crisis contains multiple contradictory elements that have over time become enmeshed into the same discursive order. Crucially, these elements have not resolved their conflictual inter-, and intra-relations, instead, are mutually constitutive despite incompatibilities: a unifying discourse is unequivocally presented as an universal project (Methmann, 2010; Torfing, 1999). The underlying logic is that major changes are required to ensure the continuation of the Earth system, yet the implication is that these changes must occur within the limits of a liberal-capitalist order defined by markets, managerialism, and technology (Foster et al., 2010; Jackson, 2011). Hence, there are two objects in this arrangement—human progress and ecological preservation—that are pursued concurrently, and that enjoy an undisputed 'god status'; discrediting either capitalism or nature is considered heresy (Norgaard, 1994). Evidence of how process unfolds was illustrated in Article III, where a discursive order (hegemonic discourse of fossil fuels) displaced internal contiguities with an 'empty signifier', thereby temporarily concealing these differences with a unifying identity that legitimated corporate inaction on climate change. This identity tends to be reproduced on a macro-systems level; major actors involved in global environmental governance—business, civil society, and (trans)national policy—share a tight interlocking relationship and are deeply embedded within the very discursive arrangement that they have co-constructed. As the maxim goes, 'politics makes strange bedfellows'. Relationships between normally

antagonistic organizations (e.g., Greenpeace and BP), gradually solidified as demonstrated in Article I. Since the second Earth Summit in Johannesburg, disparate actors have coalesced into discourse coalition.

Second, the deadlock stems from the *path-dependent* articulation of multiple incongruent elements over time (Maielli, 2015; Unruh, 2000). Therefore, each instance in which a new element is added to ever-expanding chain to produce 'new' discursive formations, the formation is conditioned by the formation that came before, which is, in turn, dependent on whatever came before that, and so on (Arthur, 1994). In this regard, Cilliers (1998: 4) for instance suggests:

> *[…] systems have a history. Not only do they evolve through time, but their past is co-responsible for their present behaviour. Any analysis of a complex system that ignores the dimension of time is incomplete, or at most a synchronic snapshot of a diachronic process.*

This is concerning because initial points of conception – ecological modernization and capitalist modes of production – stand at odds with the plethora of newly acquired discourses (e.g., environmentalism or 'nature'). This way, global environmental governance continues to repurpose solutions to the global ecological crisis such as sustainable development or corporate sustainability, that are dependent on concepts ill-equipped to deal with the complexity of large-scale environmental issues (Quack, 2013). Furthermore, as illustrated across all four articles, these 'solutions', despite being considered radical upon conception, are soon diluted as they become mainstream governance mechanisms. For example, as Article II illustrated, the European oil and gas supermajors constructed myths that functioned to obfuscate economy-ecology tensions; in other words, complexity was too overbearing, and was thus simply avoided. Ignoring that modern organizations cannot accommodate this sort of complexity, and pursuing ill-designed solutions to the global ecological crisis, leads to 'misfires' (Nyberg and Wright, 2015). It should therefore come as no surprise that climate change is regarded as "the greatest example of market failure we have ever seen" (Stern, 2007: 1).

A further example here regards the most prominent solution currently advocated by the international political community – technology. In this respect, Article II referred to a 'techno-fix myth', which emphasizes human ingenuity and engineering expertise as panacea to stop climate change. These technologies commonly include carbon capture and storage (CCS) and liquefied natural gas (LNG), amongst others. Importantly, such technological innovations are based on a linage of path-dependent interactions between technological, economic, and cultural systems. However, techno-fixes merely perform dominant discourses of ecological modernization, which is itself based on modernization and hence industrial advancement (Banerjee, 2003). Similarly, the emphasis on innovation and technology is based on patents (private ownership of capital), which is a cornerstone function of capitalism; as suggested previously, capitalism in turn relies on the destruction of the natural environment to thrive (Böhm et al., 2012; Foster et al., 2010; Wright and Nyberg, 2015a). Because of the way techno-fix discourse are articulated—i.e., heavily dependent on ecological modernization and capitalism—global environmental governance willfully accepts technologies such as CCS because ecological modernization aligns with the 'common interest', irrespective of obvious scaling impracticalities regarding CCS (Syal, 2017). Without reconsidering capitalism and modernization, whatever solutions are stacked on top of these social-economic systems, given that they were not initially designed to address the global ecological crisis, will likely continue to reproduce the systems upon which they are based and therefore. In doing so, the ecological crisis is likewise reproduced.

As mentioned previously, I was inspired to consider this social-symbolic deadlock based on complex system theory's application with respect to climate change (Folke, 2006; Ruth and Coelho, 2007). In this respect, similar to the multi-level, multi-method approach taken in this thesis, complex systems theory is often used to explore the relationship between two perspectives, as suggested by Levy and Lichtenstein (2011: 603):

> *A macro-level systems perspective emphasizes structural inertia, misaligned incentives, and failures of collective action. A more micro-level perspective, however, suggests that under certain conditions, networked actors will engage in a multitude of local initiatives and experimentation, leading to systemic learning and adaptation.*

The social-symbolic deadlock presented here goes a step further by considering how the interactions that occur across macro- and micro-levels may manifest as a vicious cycle: the effect of a micro-level action may feed back onto itself (Cilliers, 1998). Indeed, this is why complex systems such as climate change are, for instance, referred to as 'super wicked problems' (Lazarus, 2009). Often utilized to understand why well intended policy decisions have the reverse effect, super wicked problems are characterized by four features: despite being serious and urgent concerns, there are no central governing authorities (Okereke et al., 2009); the problem – e.g., climate change – is erratic (Holling, 2001); action aimed at solving the problem has unintended knock-on effects (Seto et al., 2016); and those who caused the problem can also solve the problem (Methmann, 2010). As suggested by Levin et al (2012: 123), these four features "combine to create a policy-making 'tragedy' where traditional analytical techniques are ill equipped to identify solutions, even when it is well recognized that actions must take place soon to avoid catastrophic future impacts."

Over time, given path-dependent processes, the dense network of cause-and-effect relationships that co-evolve simultaneously creates a self-perpetuating inertia. This inescapable 'carbon lock-in', Unruh (2000: 817) suggests "arises through a combination of systematic forces that perpetuate fossil fuel-based infrastructures in spite of their known environmental externalities and the apparent existence of cost-neutral, or even cost-effective, remedies." As these broader systemic complexities are never resolved, they co-evolve into 'systems within systems'; intervention is often very costly and unpredictable (Popa et al., 2015). Hence, the sheer scope of dealing with climate change results in 'free-riding' and collective action dilemmas, where no single actor wishes to act because of the hopeful belief that others will do so (Ansari et al., 2013). However, whereas complex system theory, and

variants thereof, focus mostly on how social-material systems co-evolve, the sort of deadlock proposed here concerns how social-symbolic mutually constitute each other over time. This has particular implications both in terms of theory, and for practice, which is the focus of the next section.

8.4.2. Theoretical implications

The main theoretical implication of a social-symbolic deadlock is that power is not exercised through context-dependent localities, but through discourses constructed as part of co-evolving systems that is path-dependent. This extends Foucault's notion that power produces social relations by performing discursive practices and/or technologies (Olssen, 2008). As suggested by Tyfield (2014: 4), power takes "the form of socio-historical regimes, the systems emergent from constellations of heterogeneous power techniques that in turn condition (the emergence of) practices, institutions and subjectivities." Exploring how these systems interlock given their discursive construction over time provides a more holistic account of why certain climate change solutions are willfully and repeatedly enacted despite their obvious ineffectiveness in addressing the global ecological crisis.

This is evidenced in Articles I, II, and III, with respect to how environmental NGOs over time started to accept the market based mechanisms such as carbon markets to address climate change. Indeed, irrespective of numerous instances where carbon markets fail (Böhm et al., 2012), global environmental governance remains transfixed on redesigning carbon markets to accurately price carbon; a practice that was fervently denounced by environmental NGOs in the early 1990s (Meckling, 2011). For example, in Article III, power was not exercised either through discourses of financial market, nor by the practice of market trading, but through an empty signifier that accommodates critique given its ability to gloss over inconsistencies related to the pricing of carbon. The concept of a 'fantasy lock-in' was evoked in Article III, in a similar vein to what I have proposed here regarding the social-symbolic deadlock. Both these concepts stress how multiple discursive systems, despite their irreconcilability, are collapsed onto each other; economic systems become completely

intertwined with natural systems as these co-evolve (Norgaard, 1994; Swyngedouw, 2011a). This is theoretically important because power is usually conceptualized as operating through, or within, discourses rather than *across* path dependent systems.

Relatedly, there are also certain implications that concern discourse theory in particular. Most notably, whilst discourse theory from a poststructuralist perspective has focused largely on how objects are "talked into being" (Phillips and Hardy, 2002), the prevalence of a social-symbolic deadlock highlights the urgency to also consider how discourses are conversely "talked *out* of being." Ironically, one reason for this arguably stems from discourse theory being too concerned with discourse, resulting in a lack of emphasis on that which is not expressed though text and talk (Newton, 2005). Indeed, as discussed in Section 3.2, discourse theory does account for the extra-discursive; there is also an expansive literature on exploring the space between discourses as silence (Brown, 2005; Chwastiak and Young, 2003), which was briefly discussed in Article I. However, the implication of a social-symbolic deadlock is that both the discursive and extra-discursive (and by this I do not mean the 'Other', see Section 3.2.5), are mutually constituted because across multiple systems, extra-discursive elements may in fact be considered as discursive. In other words, what is rendered as a cultural object in one language system may fall on deaf ears in others.

Importantly, although discourse theory is well traversed in terms of examining how 'truth' is constructed over time, and thus how non-truths are excluded from a discursive order (Phillips and Hardy, 2002), it cannot fully explain why, even if 'truth' is considered completely "bizarre" (Wright and Nyberg, 2015a: 28), subjects find it almost impossible not to identify with this 'bizarre truth'. Take for instance how, despite the proven financial advantages, large-scale solar installations are only now starting to emerge in some industrialized countries and account for a small fraction of total energy supply (Vaughan, 2017). In contrast whilst the dangers of continuing a fossil fuel energy system are known as 'truth', as highlighted in Article III regarding BP's relationship with the state, most governments continue to give substantial subsidies to fossil fuel companies to find more fossil

fuels (Lawrence and Davies, 2015). The UK government, for instance, shortly before agreeing to sign the much-celebrated Paris Agreement, withdrew subsidies from renewable energy projects (Carrington, 2016a). Such contradictory acts, from a systems perspective, are considered as resulting from contradictions that occur across multiple levels (e.g., contradictions within economic systems). Therefore, this thesis stressed that the global ecological crisis was constituted by interlocking discourses that operate on multiple levels.

The second implication of a social-symbolic deadlock regards nature. In this respect, it is worthwhile reflecting on the concept of the Anthropocene, which was briefly highlighted in the beginning of this thesis. The Anthropocene refers to a new epoch that humanity has apparently entered where the Earth system stops functioning according to the laws of nature alone, and becomes a product humanity's geological impacts (Crutzen, 2002; Hamilton, 2015; Steffen, et al., 2007). The manifestation of a social-symbolic deadlock as constituted by struggles over the ecological crisis in many ways supports the Anthropocene concept. However, whilst the Anthropocene is hypothesized from a 'nature as real' philosophy—that human activity is a material force that shapes the functioning of the Earth system—this thesis extends the Anthropocene concept by emphasizing how the interplay between discursive systems determine the Earth system, and indeed nature.

The Anthropocene has been explored through a cultural lens (Latour, 2013; Swyngedouw, 2011a). Political ecology literature in particular suggest that the Anthropocene confirms how natural systems are not only impacted by culture, but also how nature has become defined as a product of culture. As Swyngedouw (2015) argues:

> *[…] what the concept of the Anthropocene does is to affirm the political nature of nature, that nature is not something given, neither by god nor by natural processes, but it is something that is constituted, that is constructed, that is made, remade, and transformed. What kind of climate do you want to inhabit?*

Similarly, in this thesis, nature was considered as constructed by social relations (see Section 3.1). It is remarkable how political contests regarding the deteriorating state of the Earth

system have constituted a deadlock, despite operating largely 'outside' nature. As such, although the context of global environmental governance is informed by natural scientific discourses, this is a political context filled with business actors, policy makers and civil society organizations. Global environmental governance is far removed from nature.

The implication of a social-symbolic deadlock is that social relations, and not nature's material dynamics, have produced human-nature impasse as discussed in this thesis' introduction. Thus, upon entering the Anthropocene, the nature-human relation fundamentally changes to one that forgoes a relationship all together; a deadlock is constituted about an object—nature—that cannot speak for itself. Rather, nature's interests are determined by organizational realities; at worst by a fossil fuel company, and at best by an environmental NGO or climate activist. However, as highlighted throughout this thesis, the radical tenants of many NGOs have long been diluted as these organizations become part of global environmental governance (Article I); similarly, climate activists too must transmit their stigmatizing efforts in order not to appear too radical (Article IV).

As such, it is not just that the Anthropocene signals "the collapse of the age old humanist distinction between natural history and human history" (2009), but more importantly a new dawn for human systems. The global ecological crisis is not of much concern: it only operates as a spectacle, a political show, or as Swyngedouw (2010) suggests, the new 'opiate of the masses' . But because these systems are defined by ongoing political struggles about their meaning, at least within the context of global environmental governance, deadlocks may occur as mutually contradictory discourses coevolve and begin to define one another. Thus, as Morton (2007: 14) suggests, nature begins to function as "a transcendental term in a material mask [that] stands at the end of a potentially infinite series of other terms that collapse into it."

If the Anthropocene concept is confirmed, and Mother Nature as all-mighty ruler of the Earth system is dethroned and completely replaced by human systems, a social-symbolic deadlock would be transcended. This is because the contradiction that has plagued global

environmental governance—most notably between economic growth and ecological preservationism—would cease to exist. Instead, human omnipotence would be confirmed (Shaw and Bonnett, 2016). Discourses of a romanticized nature representing some sort of majestic wilderness that is somehow 'out there', to be admired for its pristine beauty and to be respected merely because of its mere existence, would be passé in the Anthropocene. After all, why protect a 'nature' that only exists as a product of culture; a nature that has no intrinsic worth, no essential properties besides those acquired by interacting human systems? Indeed, accepting a social-symbolic deadlock means accepting that catastrophe is not something we await, but something that is already happening (Mckibben, 2012; Žižek, 2010).

However, it is unlikely that humanity would surrender its fetishism for the imagined existence of a primordial nature. Herein lays a limit to the Anthropocene concept, which also makes transcending a social symbolic deadlock difficult. The Earth system, similar to economic systems, social systems, and geopolitical systems, is so vast and complex that any attempt at imagining the entire system undermines the possibility of understanding the system itself. This is why, as Jameson (2003: 73) notes, "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism." Luhmann (1982), a seminal systems theory thinker, is adamant that humans are unable to comprehend complex systems, suggesting that societies will always construct their realities as simplifications (this is why myths are constructed, see Article II). Whilst this might be accurate in some respects, the question remains as to how alleviate a deadlock that emerges when simplified binaries begin to mutually contradict each other, and, in the case with the global ecological crisis, threaten life on Earth. I reflect on this question next by discussing practical implications of this thesis.

8.4.3. Practical implications

In this section, I shift the somewhat pessimistic tone of this thesis thus far, and suggest some practical implications. However, I must stress that the critical undercurrent of this thesis cannot be underscored enough. I have illustrated how the current state of nature—whether defined as 'real' or as 'constructed'—is concerning, the dangers of which are exacerbated

given how a social-symbolic deadlock is hindering effective global environmental governance. Below, I illustrate how governance may become more effective if the locus of control shifts from a global, top-down authority, to a local, community based form of governance. I also discuss the implications for business, policy and civil society organizations.

A shift from global environmental governance to localized environmental programs must occur to transcend a social-symbolic deadlock. Whilst there is much to admire about coordinated international action, for instance regarding disaster relief efforts, there is little evidence that supports furthering the sort mega-scale global environmental governance as presented in this thesis (Andonova et al., 2009; Bäckstrand, 2006; Springett, 2013). Indeed, there are examples that suggest environmental governance does work on an international level—e.g., consider how the Montreal Protocol 'closed' the hole in the ozone (Gareau, 2008), or the tangible successes of the Forest Stewardship Council (Eberlein et al., 2014)—but they represent tiny subsystems that focus on isolated sustainability issues. Such examples also pale in comparison to the mammoth scale of global environmental governance currently pursued by the international policy community (Newell, 2008).

The most worrying aspect is that 'top-down' global environmental governance is often considered the *de facto* approach to solving environmental issues. In the public sphere, and within mainstream news media, global environmental governance is commonly celebrated – evidenced recently regarding frenzy surrounding the Paris Agreement at the end of 2015 (Harvey, 2015; Kinley, 2016). Despite my critical skepticism, I had tears in my eyes when the Paris Agreement was announced. However, as I recall, jubilant statements about the Paris Agreement being an international triumph were quickly countered by legal experts (Rajamani, 2016), climate scientists (Milman, 2015), and grassroots activists (Mckibben, 2015) who were more skeptical. Collectively, these voices stress that the Agreement neglected the sheer magnitude of what needs to occur to substantively address the Earth system's declining well-being. Indeed, as suggested in Article III, global governance is merely an empty signifier that holds together a precarious arrangement of contingent elements

(Methmann, 2010; Swyngedouw, 2010). Nevertheless, as stressed by Laclau and Mouffe (2001), this arrangement is always prone to dislocatation, similar to how a fossil fuels hegemony was shattered as illustrated in Article III. Indeed, events such as the outward rejection by US president Donald Trump regarding the existence of dangerous anthropogenic climate change, let alone implementing the Paris Agreement (Milman et al., 2017), illustrates the fragility of global environmental governance as a system. Many fear that that the US's withdrawal from global environmental governance will seriously hinder the likelihood of tangible reductions in total GHG emissions globally (Worland, 2017b), not only given the policy setback, but given that the US remains the second largest emitter of carbon (IEA, 2016).

A better approach here is to return to the local level and emphasize small-scale environmental initiatives that are led by local, as opposed to national or transnational, communities. Take for instance how approximately half of Germany's rural energy supply systems were overhauled by local village communities—supported by regional bodies—creating cooperative schemes to fund bio-energy plants, amongst other renewable energy projects (Adam, 2013; Burger and Weinman, 2012). Although these projects were supported by regional councils, they were not mandated either by the German state, the European Commission, or any transnational authority (FNR, 2017). A similar picture unfolds with respect to the advancements made by the State of Vermont in the US, which again, invests in renewable energy irrespective of the political contests occurring in Washington DC about whether climate change is a hoax fabricated by the Chinese (Buncombe, 2017), or on a macro-system level with respect to global environmental governance (Levy and Newell, 2005). There is also ample evidence that small-scale renewable technologies work better in developing country contexts where national governments are arguably least pressured to reconsider their energy supplies (Terrapon-Pfaff et al., 2014; Winkler, 2005).

Taking a localized approach does not mean that these contexts are completely detached from global environmental governance. However, what it does suggest is that a 'bottom-up'

approach avoids the paralyzing effects of the deadlock currently plaguing global environmental governance. Here, policy makers can play a significant role to stimulate local projects with financial resources and know-how. Financial resources for these local energy projects should come from two sources. First, national governments must stop subsidizing fossil fuel companies, and reinvest this capital in helping community energy projects (Bast et al., 2015). As Unruh (2002: 828) suggests: "governments have direct control over carbon-intense sectors and, while the rational behavior would be to correct the externality of environmental degradation, governments instead exacerbate the problem through continued subsidization." The second source of financing should come from the corporate sector. In this respect, businesses could profit substantially from considering small-scale projects as commercial opportunities. For instance, as illustrated in Article II, one of Germany's 'Big 4' energy providers, E.ON, recently created a spin-off business that focuses specifically profiting from the 'Energiewende', or Germany's energy transition (Carrington, 2012). This goes without mentioning the boom in small- and medium-size enterprises that focus specifically on servicing local renewable projects (Clark, 2017; Strunz, 2014).

Shifting from a top-down to a bottom-up approach would potentially reinvigorate a sense of radicalism that has largely been diluted (Tregidga et al., 2015). Throughout this thesis, this was a significant theme: radical NGOs such as Greenpeace conforming to hegemonic practices such as market-based mechanisms to solving environmental problems (Ansari et al., 2013); concepts once considered radical such as sustainable development being diluted to mean nothing more than economic development (Trumpy, 2008); outlier companies such as The Body Shop co-opted into mainstream corporations (Berger et al., 2007). The question here remains, how can organizations challenge hegemonic structures without seeming too radical by powerholders, and thereby losing their "right to speak"? The short answer is that they cannot – once a cobra is defanged, it can never regain its bite. Within the context of global environmental governance, most civil society organizations—including the big environmental NGOs—have become deeply embedded as part of global environmental

governance (Meckling, 2011). Their conformity to the dominant logic of solving environmental issues with more capitalism, irrespective of how they reframe this as for instance, 'creating natural value' (see WWF in Article I), their position merely strengthens the deadlock that has stalemated global environmental governance.

There are two primary ways of avoiding being co-opted (Jaffee and Howard, 2010). First, radical organizations can become more radical. In contrast to most mainstream environmental NGOs, this strategy has been adopted by Friends of the Earth (FOE) International. FOE have outwardly rejected the idea of carbon markets and other high-tech proposals such as geo-engineering since these were initially suggested after the first Earth Summit in Rio (FOE, 2012). FOE also refuses corporate sponsorship and does not invest in fossil fuel companies, which stands at odds with, amongst others the WWF which openly sells the use of its iconic panda logo to the highest bidder (Baur and Schmitz, 2012). I am not suggesting that either strategy is more effective necessarily, only that, if 'the resistance' wants to continue resisting, it should resist more, as opposed to resist less because it has joined the mainstream. The second option is for radical organizations to work covertly and be astute as to how avoid co-optation. One way of doing this is to remain a grassroots organization that focuses on specialized disruptive projects. The case of 350.org, as discussed in Article IV shows how an environmentalist organization maintains a radical zest, despite its impressive size. Not only does the organization focus on specific projects—fossil fuel divestment being one—but the organization is in fact composed of hundreds of smaller grassroots organizations, notably student societies that rebranded themselves as affiliated with 350.org. Indeed, the climate activists that featured in Article IV, also engaged in calculated practices (this was referred to as 'transmitting practices'), that facilitated their attempts to disrupt the institution of fossil fuel, without losing their radical edge. In this respect, they worked *through* allied organizations such as 'green' investor groups that were considered legitimate by mainstream financial players and policy makers. Hence, they were able to indirectly engage in disruptive work, and in doing so, maintain their ideological zest.

8.4.4. Limitations and opportunities for future research

This thesis examined discursive struggles surrounding the global ecological crisis. As with any piece of research, certain themes were neglected that could be explored in future research. Although each article discussed its own specific limitations, in this section I provide an overall reflection.

Noticeably, although this thesis concerned nature, I did not study natural systems; likewise, although I studied interaction between social systems (e.g., organizations), I overlooked social outcomes such as poverty and inequality. Of course, these issues are often related to struggles surrounding the ecological crisis (Parks and Roberts, 2010; Roberts and Parks, 2007; Tutu, 2014b). This is something I addressed briefly in Section 2.1 – the ecological crisis most severely impacts those that have done the least to deserve it. Hence, a fruitful avenue for future research would be to focus on how struggles surrounding the ecological crisis implicates societies, and in particular vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. This could potentially strengthen the extant literature on business-society-nature nexus, especially those studies interested in how these three dimensions co-constitute one another as interconnected systems (Marcus et al., 2010). Furthermore, understanding how struggles over the natural environment within the context of global environmental governance shapes social issues may be beneficial international development studies (Hallegatte et al., 2017). For instance, drawing from postcolonial perspectives, it would be worthwhile to examine how global environmental governance favors the position of Western elites, which, in turn impacts social issues such as poverty.

The second limitation is context related. Importantly, the empirical focus of this thesis revolved around the extreme case of fossil fuel companies and the natural environment. The reason for focusing on the fossil fuels industry, as opposed to less-extreme organizational contexts (e.g., the financial industry) is precisely because of the contradiction of a fossil fuel company addressing issues surrounding the natural environment (Ihlen, 2009; Schlichting, 2013; Wright and Nyberg, 2015a). This extreme context demonstrates the tensions,

contradictions, and moments of identity crisis that occurs when a discursive space becomes dislocated (e.g., Hensmans, 2003). However, because there is no need to pull back the curtain to reveal the Wizard of Oz, a villain status is easily projected onto the fossil fuel industry, which are, just as I am too, a product of discourse (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). Hence, there are certainly other centers of power currently operating 'under the radar' with respect to research on the natural environment. For example, the cattle industry has a substantial impact on the natural environment (Kluger, 2011), yet rarely features in academic research regarding organizations and the natural environment. Similarly, whilst 'hot topic' industries such as car manufactures or aviation are often scrutinized for in terms of ethical scandals and their carbon credentials, the shipping business rarely features despite contributing to 4.5% of total global emissions (Harvey, 2016). This raises question of whether certain industries are placed under the microscope at the expense of investigating others. Could it be that focusing on the fossil fuel industry, and resource intensive industries more generally, is akin to the metaphor of losing your keys and searching for them under the street light? Thus, future research might turn the focus onto these less examined industries.

A final set of important limitations, and thus opportunities for future research, are related to methods. This thesis considered documents as its main source of data. Whilst this is not an issue *per se*—discourse studies usually involve an analysis of text and talk in context—there is certainly an opportunity to broaden not only this study's data corpus, but encourage other discourse-related studies to consider encompassing a wider data set. In this vein, more emphasis should be attributed to other visual representations, in the form of images for instance (Iedema, 2003). These are particularly relevant for sustainability related studies given the importance placed on affective dimensions. I was, for instance, intrigued by the cover pages of the European oil and gas supermajor' sustainability reports, which shifted over time from images of nature scenes, to images of engineering and science. What triggered this change and how do these images related to shifts in the text? Multimodal discourse analysis could be especially revealing in this respect given that it envelops both verbal and non-verbal

forms of communication (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). Similarly, new-media such as social media sites, despite being of increasingly importance for global environmental governance and organization studies more generally, was not foregrounded in this thesis. However, the digital era has brought with it a whole new array of discursive practices that are unique in the way they constitute social relations (Barros, 2014). Consider for instance how, as illustrated in Article IV, the UNFCCC used Twitter to communicate their endorsement of fossil fuel divestment by including the Twitter account of the leading campaigner organization 350.org, and posting a picture of Archbishop Desmond Tutu commenting on climate change. Future studies could focus on how this discursive practice is unique compared to other forms of media (Castello et al., 2016).

Relatedly, materiality was largely sidelined in this thesis, as is the case with most discourse studies (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Iedema, 2003). This is unfortunate since discourses not only require material object to give meaning to, but are themselves material. This could be of particular value in organization studies where materiality has become increasingly important area of research (Phillips and Oswick, 2012). There are also several frameworks and perspectives within communication studies that account for materiality. In this respect, Cooren (2004: 388) for instance suggests that "what constitutes an organization is a hybrid of human and non-human contributions. […] Humans are acted upon as well as acting through the textual and physical objects that they produce." This study could have benefitted from these sorts of considerations – CEO speeches, which were used in Articles II and IV, occurred in material spaces that have performative effects. Similarly, climate activists used and array of materials during their campaigning efforts, which could have been considered; again, this would have provided an alternative perspective in terms of how discursive struggles unfold as a result of 'non-human' influences.

All in all, this thesis suggests that the relationship between organizations and the natural environment has reached impasse – as organizations try to escape this social-symbolic deadlock, they only become deeper entrenched. The same thinking that created the global

ecological crisis is counterintuitively being utilized to resolve the crisis. Global environmental governance—once a highly politicized space where notions such as 'sustainable development' or 'corporate environmentalism' were considered radical game changers—has become de-politicized; organizational subjects merely reproduce ineffective top-down forms of governance. Thankfully, there are ways out of the deadlock. This not only pertains to practical interventions, as explained above, but organization scholars could also have a meaningful impact in transcending the current impasse. To do so, however, organization and management scholars must begin to more seriously consider how environmental issues are 'organized outside organization'. Thereby, organizational life may be understood in a more holistic perspective as organizations are examined not in terms of their localized contexts, but as embedded within larger interconnecting systems as constituted by discourse.

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Appendix 1

		1997	1998
Speeches	Total		
	Shell		Institute of Chartered Accountants (Fay in Patten, 1998)
	BP	Stanford University (Browne, 1997) Bundestag, Berlin (Browne in Coonan, 1997) Greenpeace Business Conference (Browne in Lean, 1997)	Alaska Support Industry Alliance (Browne in Rosen, 1998) Missouri Botanical Garden (Browne, 1998) AGM, London (BP, 1998) Johns Hopkins (Browne, 1998) World Energy Congress (Browne in Browne, 1998d) Yale School of Management (Browne in Cowell, 1998)
Media articles and interviews	Total		
	Shell	FT interview (Herkstroeter in Corzine, 1997)	
	BP	New Statesman interview (Browne in Ghazi, 1997) NYT interview (Browne in Ibrahim, 1997) FT interview (Browne in Boulton, 1997)	Washington Post interview (Browne in Hamilton, 1998) Independent interview (Moody-Stuart in Harrison, 1998)
Corporate reports	Total		
	Shell	Shell annual report (Shell, 1997b) Health, safety and environment report (Shell, 1997a)	The Shell report (Herkströter, 1998)
	BP		Environmental and social review (Browne, 1998a)
		9	11

1999	2000
Global Sustainable Energy Fair, Sustain 99 (van der Veer, 1999)	
Economic Club of Detroit (Browne in Evanoff, 1999) National Environmental Research Council (Browne in Mitchell, 1999) American Association of Petroleum Geologists (Browne in Griffin, 1999)	Conference on Corporate Social Responsibility (Browne, 2000a) NPRA Annual Meeting (Browne in Brideau, 2000) World Petroleum Congress (Browne in Pike, 2000)
RTL Radio interview (Desmarest in Reuters News, 1999)	
The Shell report (Moody-Stuart, 1999)	The Shell report (Moody-Stuart, 2000)
Environmental and social review (Browne, 1999)	Environmental and social review (Browne, 2000b)
7	5

2001	2002
Shell's ‘Long Term Energy Scenarios’ (Watts in Mitchell, 2001)	Chatham House speech, London (Philip Watts, 2002)
	Chatham House (Browne in Garten, 2002) Stanford University (Browne in Frey, 2002)
	NYT interview (Browne in Frey, 2002) Minnesota Public Radio interview (Minnesota Public Radio, 2002)
	CSR report (Desmarest, 2002)
The Shell report (Watts, 2001)	The Shell report (Watts, 2002)
Environmental and social review (Browne, 2001)	Environmental and social review (Browne, 2002)
3	8

2003	2004
Shell Center for Sustainability at Houston's Rice University (van der Veer, 2003a)	
Speech to Institutional Investors Group (Browne, 2003a)	Toronto's Empire Club (Browne in Mahony, 2004)
Interview, NYT, (Watts in Becker, 2003)	
FT interview (Browne in FT, 2003)	FT interview (Dudley in Ostrovsky, 2004)
CSR report (Desmarest, 2003)	CSR report (Desmarest, 2004)
The Shell report (van der Veer, 2003b)	The Shell report (van der Veer, 2004)
Sustainability report (Browne, 2003b)	Sustainability report (Browne, 2004b)
7	5

2005	2006
International Oil Summit in Paris (van der Veer, 2005b)	Cambridge Energy Research Associates conference (van der Veer, 2006b) Arab Strategy Forum (van der Veer, 2006a)
Brookings Institute speech (Browne, 2005a) European Union Energy Security Conference speech (Browne in Dow Jones, 2005a) International Economics in Washington (Browne in Dow Jones, 2005b) World Petroleum Congress Johannesburg (Browne in Hopson, 2005)	International Petroleum Week (Browne in Fields, 2006) Columbia University (Browne in Burnham, 2006) Anchorage industry luncheon (Browne in Rosen, 2006)
FT interview (van der Veer in Catan, 2005)	NYT interview (van der Veer in Mouawad, 2006)
FT interview (Browne in Harvey, 2005) CNBC interview (Browne in CNBC, 2005)	NYT interview (Browne in Wald, 2006) WSJ interview (Browne in Murray, 2006)
CSR report (Desmarest, 2005)	CSR report (de Margerie, 2006)
The Shell sustainability report (van der Veer, 2005a)	The Shell sustainability report (van der Veer, 2006c)
Sustainability report (Browne, 2005b)	Sustainability report (Browne, 2006)
11	11

2007	2008
	World Petroleum Congress (Dow Jones International News, 2008) Conference on World Security, Geneva (de Margerie, 2008b)
	Shell scenarios for the 21st century' (van der Veer, 2008c) International Energy Forum in Rome (van der Veer, 2008a) IUCN World Conservation Congress (van der Veer, 2008b)
Berlin Business Leaders' Summit (Hayward in Fildes, 2007) EAGE Annual Conference - London EXCEL Centre (Hayward, 2007a)	International Renewable Energy Conference (Hayward in The Oil Daily, 2008) World Petroleum Congress (Hayward in Polczer, 2008)
WSJ commentary (de Margerie in Gold and Davis, 2007)	
Commentary in Guardian (van der Veer in Macalister, 2007)	NYT interview (van der Veer in Mouawad, 2008)
Editorial (Browne in WSJ, 2007)	Interview in Guardian (Hayward in Macalister, 2008)
Environment and society report (de Margerie, 2007)	Environment and society report (de Margerie, 2008a)
The Shell sustainability report (van der Veer, 2007)	The Shell sustainability report (van der Veer, 2008d)
Sustainability report (Hayward, 2007b)	Sustainability review (Hayward, 2008)
8	12

2009	2010
Offshore Europe Conference, Aberdeen, Scotland (Henshall and Adams, 2009) World Gas Conference (Dow Jones Energy Service, 2009)	United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary General on Business and Human Rights, Paris, France (de Margerie, 2010b) 10th International Oil Summit, Paris (de Margerie in International Oil Daily, 2010)
10th International Oil Summit, held in Paris (van der Veer, 2009a) 14th Asia Oil and Gas Conference in Kuala Lumpur (van der Veer, 2009b)	The WSJ's ECO:nomics conference in Santa Barbara (Voser, 2010e) St. Gallen Conference (Voser, 2010d) 21st World Energy Congress in Montreal (Voser, 2010a) Oil and Money Conference in London (Voser, 2010c)
Cambridge Energy Research Associates (Hayward in The Oil Daily, 2009) Latin American Energy Conference (Hayward in Campbell and Woodall, 2009) World Gas Conference (Hayward in Reuters News, 2009) Oil & Money conference (Hayward in Hayward, 2009a)	London Business School (Hayward, 2010e) Peterson Institute, (Hayward, 2010a) House of Commons, London (Hayward, 2010c)
Interview in FT (de Margerie in Hoyos, 2009)	Commentary in Reuters (de Margerie Reuters, 2010)
Press conference (van der Veer in Schneyer, 2009)	
Commentary in (Hayward in Macalister, 2009a) Commentary in FT (Hayward in Crooks, 2009) Interview with WSJ (Hayward in Chazan, 2009)	Interview in Guardian (Hayward in Macalister, 2010) Commentary,(Hayward in Crooks, 2010)
Environment and society report (de Margerie, 2009)	Environment and society report (de Margerie, 2010a)
Royal Dutch Shell plc Sustainability Report (Voser, 2009a)	Royal Dutch Shell plc Sustainability Report (Voser, 2010b)
Sustainability review (Hayward, 2009b)	Sustainability review (Hayward, 2010d)
16	14

2011
CERA Conference, Houston, USA (de Margerie in The Oil Daily, 2011) Chamber of Commerce, Calgary, Canada (de Margerie in Polczer, 2011) Asia Oil and Gas Conference, Kuala Lumpur, Indonesia (de Margerie in International Oil Daily, 2011)
Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Programme, London, UK (Voser, 2011b) Shell Annual Reception, London, UK (Voser, 2011d) Singapore Energy Summit (Voser, 2011a) Harvard Business School Club of the Netherlands and the Ivy Circle, The Hague, Netherlands (Voser, 2011c) Alumni of Harvard, IMD, INSEAD, Rochester Business Schools (Voser, 2011g) Remarks on receiving the Channing Corporate Citizenship Award (Voser, 2011e)
Tsinghua University, Tsinghua, China (Dudley, 2011a) Energy Outlook 2030, St James Square, London (Dudley, 2011b) CERA Week Conference, Houston, USA (Dudley, 2011c) World National Oil Companies Congress (Dudley, 2011g) The World Petroleum Congress, Doha, Qatar (Dudley, 2011f) The 2011 Hinton lecture, Royal Institution of Great Britain (Dudley, 2011e)
WSJ commentary (de Margerie in Herron, 2011) WSJ interview (de Margerie in Amiel, 2011)
Commentary in Guardian (Hayward in Finch et al., 2011)
Environment and society report (de Margerie, 2011)
Royal Dutch Shell plc Sustainability Report (Voser, 2011f)
Sustainability review (Dudley, 2011d)
21

2012	2013
World Gas Conference (de Margerie in Platts European Gas Daily, 2012)	
Central Party School, The Communist Party of China, Beijing (Voser, 2012a) 6th World Water Forum, Marseille, France (Voser, 2012e) 25th World Gas Conference, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Voser, 2012b)	Central Party School, Beijing (Voser, 2013d) International Petroleum Technology Conference, Beijing (Voser, 2013e) Chief Executives Club of Boston (Voser, 2013b) Oil and Money Conference, London, UK (Voser, 2013c) World Energy Congress 2013 Daegu, South Korea (Voser, 2013a)
BP Energy Outlook 2030, London (Dudley, 2012a) Greater Cleveland Partnership speech, Cleveland, US (Dudley, 2012d) Abu Dhabi Speech - "New times, new thinking" (Dudley, 2012c) International Petroleum Week, London, UK (Dudley, 2012e) Economic Club of Chicago (Dudley, 2012b)	WACA Conference, Washington DC, (Dudley, 2013b) Oxford Energy Seminar, Oxford University, UK (Dudley, 2013a) Canada Europe Energy Summit, London (Dudley, 2013c)
	Interview, RTL Radio (de Margerie in Reuters News, 2013)
Commentary (Voser in Reuters News, 2012)	Financial Post, Special Report (Gold, 2013)
(Dudley in Reuters, 2012)	Interview in WSJ (Dudly in Jenkins, 2013)
CSR report (de Margerie, 2012)	CSR report (de Margerie, 2013)
Royal Dutch Shell plc Sustainability Report (Voser, 2012c)	Royal Dutch Shell plc Sustainability Report (van Beurden, 2013)
Sustainability review (Dudley, 2012f)	Sustainability review (Dudley, 2013d)
13	14

2014	2015	TOTAL
	World Gas Conference, Paris (Pouyanné in Kent and Landauro, 2015)	*11*
Global Energy Policy at Columbia University (van Beurden, 2014c) Centennial celebration, Shell Technology Centre (van Beurden, 2014a)	Quest Carbon Capture and Storage speech (van Beurden, 2015b) OPEC International Seminar (van Beurden, 2015a)	*36*
International Petroleum Exhibition & Conference, Abu Dhabi (Dudley, 2014a) Oil & Money conference, London, UK (Dudley, 2014b) World Petroleum Congress (Dudley, 2014e)	World Gas Conference, Paris (Dudley, 2014c) Mexican Energy Reform Summit (Dudley, 2015a)	*55*
		7
FT, interview (van Beurden in Chazan, 2014) Interview in Reuters(van Beurden in Kemp, 2014)	Statement in FT (van Beurden in Crooks, 2015)	*12*
CNN International Interview (Dudley in Quest, 2014)	Interview, CNBC (Dudely in Cosgrave, 2015)	*25*
Sustainable growth report (Pouyanné, 2014b)	Integrating climate into our strategy (Pouyanné, 2015)	*14*
Royal Dutch Shell plc Sustainability Report (van Beurden, 2014b)	Royal Dutch Shell plc Sustainability Report (van Beurden, 2015c)	*18*
Sustainability review (Dudley, 2014d)	Sustainability review (Dudley, 2015b)	*18*
11	10	196